



Antecedents and Outcomes of Brand Love:

A qualitative study within the Swedish clothing industry.

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ABSTRACT

Within brand management research, brand love has been an increasingly popular research subject. Both antecedents and outcomes of brand love were noticed to comprise a large part of previous research. The main purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of brand love. The terms discussed in this thesis are brand management, brand identity, brand image, emotional branding, brand love, brand commitment and brand loyalty.

A research gap was identified within the literature on brand love. Much research has focused on outcomes, but less focus has been on how brand love commences. Therefore, research going more in depth in this area is needed. We found that congruence between brand identity and brand image were emphasized in research and that it needs to be considered within brand management due to its beneficial outcomes. Such a congruence has however not been thought of as an antecedent to brand love in previous studies. Thus, we see that there is a need to investigate this matter further. Through achieving the purpose of this thesis, the hope is to gain a deeper understanding of how brand love commences and how a congruent brand image and brand identity can be the beginning of such a development. The research question was stated as *“How can brand love facilitate the development of brand loyalty and brand commitment through a congruent brand identity and brand image?”*

To be able to investigate this issue and to fulfil the purpose of this thesis, a qualitative study was conducted. We interviewed four company representatives of Swedish clothing brands as well as eight of their customers. The findings resulted in a conceptual framework where we saw that when a congruent brand identity and brand image existed, brand love could facilitate the development of brand loyalty and brand commitment. However, it was also found that brand loyalty could exist without customers experiencing brand love. Additionally, a theoretical contribution was made in terms of strengthening the literature on emotional brand attachments. Within the findings we could confirm previously identified antecedents to emotional brand attachment, such as traditional customer outcomes and sentimental/emotional memory. We were also able to identify credibility as an antecedent to emotional brand attachment based on our findings.

The managerial implication of our conceptual framework is that the discrepancy between the company's brand identity and the customers' brand image need to be kept to a minimum. Another managerial implication that we suggest is for clothing retail companies to include an emotional approach in their marketing strategies of their brand. We base this suggestion on the theoretical findings of emotional attachment antecedents.

Key Words: *congruence, brand love, brand management, brand identity, brand image, brand loyalty, brand commitment, emotional branding.*

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Umeå School of Business and Economics

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Sincerely,

Malin Skoog & Mathilda Söderström

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce the topic of this thesis and will begin with explaining how our personal interest in the subject has led us to writing this thesis. We will then describe the problem background and give an introduction of the chosen clothing companies, i.e. the brands, which are participating in this study. Next, a theoretical background will be presented followed by the identified research gap and our argumentation as to why this research is needed and how it will contribute to the theoretical field as well as the managerial field is given. The research gap will lead us in stating our research question of this thesis. To end this chapter we will state the purpose of this thesis.

1.1 Personal Interest in Subject

We are two management and marketing students currently enrolled at the International Business Program at Umeå School of Business and Economics. When choosing the subject of this thesis we were both determined for it to be a subject that we both are deeply interested in. We wanted our curiosity and interest to lead us through the writing of this thesis and an interest in clothes, retail and branding was common denominators between us. Moreover, our interest in brand management was what made us choose the subject for this thesis. In the research by Urde (1999), the strategic importance of brands was explained. We found this strategic importance of brands fascinating and were intrigued to explore it more in-depth. Kapferer (1997, p. 46.) presented another view of the importance of brands when explaining how brands are a result of market differentiation. This view of brands as a differentiation tool developed our interest in brand management and lead to the willingness to investigate it further. We are specifically interested in brand management within the clothing industry. Both of us have a personal interest in fashion and the clothing industry. Furthermore, we both aspire to work within this dynamic industry in the future, which we find exciting. This aspiration is further a reason for us to choose this specific field. Our belief is that having a personal interest in a possible future career in the clothing industry can be a motivator for writing a thesis about this subject. It is also in our interest to further research the specific bond between customers and clothes because we ourselves find clothes to be an expression of our personalities. As a final point, the clothing market we have chosen to conduct research within is the Swedish clothing market. We have a bigger interest in the Swedish brands and feel as those brands are more familiar to us. We are both of Swedish nationality and have grown up with many Swedish clothing brands. Therefore, we are more familiar with these brands.

1.2 Problem Background

The Swedish clothing industry has gone through a transformation, in many different ways. One of the first changes in this transformation began in the 1960's, when the clothing industry went from being a crafts-oriented market into becoming more standardized and an increase in mass production could be seen (Crewe & Davenport, 1992, found in Power & Hauge, 2008, p. 130). This transformation of the clothing industry included a strategic mind-set as well. Alänge & Jacobsson (1994, p. 469)

explained that in the 1970's and the 1980's the focus in the Swedish clothing industry was on value-creating activities, for instance design and marketing. During these decades, the production of clothes was generally outsourced outside of Sweden (Alänge & Jacobsson, 1994, p. 469). Brand management as a strategic tool became popular among high-end fashion companies in the 1980's and in the 1990's this was also acknowledged more and more among common clothing retailers as well (Power & Hauge, 2008, pp. 131-132). Brand management revolves around brand managers' ability to incorporate their products into the everyday life of their consumers and that the brands should be used in a manner which evoke positive feelings with the consumer (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 190). McColl & Moore (2011, p. 100) further emphasized the strategic impact branding has. They performed an exploratory study in a fashion-retailing context and concluded that branding is a way for the retailers to keep control over what is delivered to the market in order for it to match the image of the company (McColl & Moore, 2011, p. 100).

As can be seen then, there has been a strategic development in the fashion and clothing industry where branding has been strongly emphasized (Power & Hauge, 2008). In the marketing research arena, branding concepts such as brand love and brand loyalty have been increasingly acknowledged during the last decade (Albert et al., 2009; Amine, 1998; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Moussa, 2015; Singh & Pattanayak, 2014). One definition of brand love is "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name" (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Singh & Pattanayak (2014, p. 40) define brand loyalty as being "expressed through the intention or behavior to repurchase a particular brand continually". Evidently, brand loyalty is a desirable outcome for brand managers when applying brand love into their marketing strategies. Other desirable outcomes of brand love have also been identified, such as brand commitment and positive word of mouth (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 262; Albert et al., 2009, p. 306).

By this investigation we hope to gain a deeper understanding of how the alignment between brand identity and brand image can serve as a direct antecedent to brand love and as an indirect antecedent to brand loyalty and brand commitment. In such a case, may brand love be seen as a facilitator between brand image/brand identity and brand commitment/brand loyalty? A deeper understanding of the relation between these terms is beneficial both for marketing managers and the research field of brand management. We believe that marketing managers in general can benefit from this understanding in terms of an increased motivation of allocating resources towards creating brand love. Further, we believe this study will contribute to the context of the Swedish clothing industry as well. There are researchers who argue that there is a difference between products in how they involve consumers and that some products would involve consumers more than others (Martin, 1998; Radder & Huang, 2008). Clothing could be such a product, which consumers could identify themselves with and develop a bond to (Solomon, 1986). We believe that it adds relevance to our choice of researching the clothing industry. Our perception is that the brands chosen within this study have products that appeal to consumers who are more involved with their clothing purchases than others.

The managerial contribution will be from the qualitative data we collect from the interviews. By combining qualitative data collected both from marketing managers and customers we hope that it can show whether or not the efforts put into the brand

management will have an effect in the brand love experienced by the customers. A clear understanding of the possible outcomes of brand love and the rewards of it that follows should work as an incitement for managers when allocating resources into their marketing budget. By performing this study our hope is that a managerial implication will be such a clearer understanding.

1.3 Participating Brands

For our study we have chosen to include the companies Boomerang, Björn Borg, Fjällräven and House of Dagmar (hereafter referred to as “Dagmar”). We have based our decision on the fact that we believe that these brands are successful and well-known Swedish brands that will add relevant views to this study. It is shown that marketers can increase the likelihood of customers engaging with their brand, and in turn affect the relationship between brand and customer (Martin, 1998, p. 13). With this in mind we view it as highly necessary as well as a general managerial need for marketing managers of clothing companies to gain a deeper understanding of what it is that their customers actually value when it comes to different brands. A short presentation on the different brands will be given down below.

1.3.1 Boomerang

In 1976 Peter Wilton and Kenneth Andram decided to create a new brand (Boomerang, 2015). They were two young men working at Jockey at the time but they had a dream about creating their own brand that reflected their common values as well as their passion for quality (Boomerang, 2015; P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Wilton and Andram wanted a name with a strong symbol and decided upon calling it Boomerang (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). The colors of red and green seen in the symbol is connected to their fondness of the Italian culture (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Boomerang’s collections are characterized as being classic Scandinavian, inspired by the ocean and nature and Stockholm’s archipelago has always been an important environment for the brand (Boomerang, 2015).

1.3.2 Björn Borg

In the name of the legend, The Björn Borg Collection was founded in 1984 with Rodhi Heintz as the lead designer (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). They started off with sports apparel, but with their daring attitude came great ideas and after a few years the company took a brave step into the underwear world (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). In 1989 the Björn Borg trademark was registered in Stockholm and by 1994 the first Björn Borg store was opened in Stockholm (Björn Borg, 2015). Björn Borg is distinguished by providing creative products, and its business concept is to provide sporty fashion to people in order for them to look and feel active and attractive (Björn Borg, 2015). The focus of Björn Borg lies in underwear but they also offer sportswear, footwear, fragrances as well as bags and eyewear through the use of licensees (Björn Borg, 2015).

1.3.3 Fjällräven

In 1960, in a town called Örnsköldsvik, a man named Åke Nordin founded Fjällräven (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Already in 1950, as a 14-year-old boy, Åke developed a frame for backpacks because he thought that the backpacks at that time was not comfortable enough, and that was the starting point for Fjällräven (Fjällräven, 2015). Fjällräven has since the start in 1960 been driven by the idea to offer timeless, functional and long-lasting equipment for outdoor experiences (Fjällräven, 2015). Nature has always been a huge inspiration for the brand and from being out in the forest and on the mountains discoveries have been made that later on have been incorporated in order to make their products even better (Fjällräven, 2015). It should be emphasised that Fjällräven is not a fashion-oriented brand per say but rather an outdoors brand that offers clothing in their assortment (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

1.3.4. House of Dagmar

The launch of the label Dagmar occurred in the spring of 2005 (House of Dagmar, 2015). It is a fashion brand created by three sisters, namely, Karin Söderlind, Kristina Tjäder and Sofia Wallenstam (House of Dagmar, 2015). The name Dagmar comes from the sisters' late grandmother who they consider to be their main source of inspiration (House of Dagmar, 2015). It is from their grandmother and her work as a tailor that the three sisters have developed their interest for design and fabrics (House of Dagmar, 2015). The style of Dagmar's design is best described as sophisticated and unconventional and traces of the Art Deco period of the 20's and 30's are seen in the colors and patterns of the different designs (House of Dagmar, 2015).

1.4 Theoretical Background

The study in this thesis is primarily focused on the area of brand management. The key concepts chosen for our theoretical departure is brand management, brand identity, brand image, emotional branding, brand love, brand loyalty and brand commitment. These concepts will be discussed further in the following sections.

The management of brands as intangible assets represents a strategic approach for companies to distinguish themselves on the market from other companies (Kapferer, 1997, p. 46; Keller, 1998, p. 2). In order to achieve this differentiation, the aim for brand marketers is to attach a unique feeling to the brand (Mallik, 2009, p. 3). A brand's aim is to embody to the customers what a company has to offer (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 740). Keller (1998, pp. 5-7) argues for intangible assets having greater financial value for companies more so than tangible assets may have. Managing brands is not a simple task, and the difficulties of building a strong brand range from internal pressures to market pressures (Aaker, 1996, pp. 26-27). M'zungu (2010, p. 608) claims that an essential part of succeeding with strategic brand management is for managers to effectively create and maintain brand equity. Brand equity is the assets associated with a brand name that supplements value to the actual product or service (Aaker, 1996, pp. 7-8). However, there are aspects of brand management that make it a part of marketing strategy worth considering. For instance, Kapferer (1997, pp. 26-34) argues that a strong brand gives value for both customers and firms, and can imply less risk for both

parties. This argumentation suits the thoughts of Farquhar (1989, pp. 25-26) as well, who says that a strong brand implies a higher level of security and stability for a firm.

Two important parts of strong brands are their brand identity and brand image (Nandan, 2005, p. 264). Nandan (2005, p. 265) states that the communication between a company and its consumers can be referred to as brand identity and brand image. Brand identity originates from the company perspective (Nandan, 2005, p. 264). Ghodeswar (2008, p. 5) define brand identity as “a unique set of brand associations implying a promise to customers and includes a core and extended identity”. A brand identity should always be based on the core competences of the companies (Jan Alsem & Kosteljik, 2008, p. 910). This is due to the fact that an identity can only be trustworthy if it is truly realized (Jan Alsem & Kosteljik, 2008, p. 910). A company seeks to communicate its individuality and distinctiveness to rivals through brand identity (Nandan, 2005, p. 265). Hence, brand identity is about how a company wishes to identify itself (Nandan, 2005, p. 265).

Srivastava & Kamdar (2009, p. 84) states that brand image “refers to consumer perceptions and encompasses a set of beliefs that consumers have about the brand”. Thus, the way in which a certain brand is positioned in a consumer’s mind can be described as brand image (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009, p. 84). According to Janonis & Virvilaitė (2007, p. 81) brand image is an outcome of brand identity. Only when consumers understand brand identity correctly, positive brand image can be developed (Janonis & Virvilaitė, 2007, p. 87). By ensuring that there is congruence between the identity and image of a brand, brand loyalty can be enhanced by the company (Nandan, 2005, p. 268). Hence, the gap between the views from the company and the perception of the consumer needs to be eliminated or minimized in order for brand loyalty to increase (Nandan, 2005, p. 268). Consumers’ brand loyalty might be predicted by consumers’ emotional attachment to the brand (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 77).

Therefore, another increasingly popular and widely used advertising strategy is emotional branding (Panda et al., 2013; Pawle & Cooper, 2006; Rossiter & Bellman, 2012). Marketers can build emotional attachment to brands as a strategy to gather financial benefits of loyalty (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1053). In today’s marketing world, creating this emotional brand attachment is a key branding issue (Malär et al., 2011, p. 35). Rossiter & Bellman (2012, p. 291) define emotional branding as “the consumer’s attachment of a strong, specific, usage-relevant emotion – such as Bonding, Companionship, or Love – to the brand”. Acquiring customers through the use of emotions also helps in reducing post-purchase dissatisfaction (Panda et al., 2013, p. 12). A brand’s most profitable customers are these ‘emotionally attached’ customers, taking into consideration that they have no need for price promotions in order to keep buying the brand (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012, p. 295).

People can form emotional attachments to a variety of objects, including places (Zenker & Rütter, 2014), celebrities (Thomson, 2006) and virtual objects such as avatars (Nagy & Koles, 2014). Most importantly for this study, people can form emotional attachments to brands (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011; Japutra et al., 2014; Thomson et al., 2005). An emotional attachment to a brand is described as the emotional bond that can evolve between a person and a particular brand (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 78). Thomson et al. (2005) provide the influential empirical work on emotional attachment to brands. According to Thomson et al. (2005, p. 78) there are differences between emotional

attachment and other constructs within marketing. Emotional attachment might be associated with constructs such as satisfaction, involvement and brand attitude favourability and should therefore be distinguished from such constructs (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 78).

The level of emotional feelings a consumer has for a brand can be defined as brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Batra et al. (2012, p. 2) suggest that brand love is a concept that begins from a consumer experience and from that experience it can develop into brand love, which can resemble an interpersonal relationship. A common notion from these definitions is that a long-term choice of a brand is connected to brand love (Batra et al., 2012, p. 5; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). However, brand love is not the same as interpersonal love and hence theories on interpersonal love should not be the basis for brand love research (Batra et al., 2012, p. 5). Love is considered as a highly complex concept and it would be difficult to apply it directly to brands and products because some elements of brand love might be overlooked when basing research on interpersonal love relationship theories (Albert et al., 2009, p. 300; Batra et al., 2012, p. 6). According to Batra et al. (2012, p. 6) the core of brand love consists of “different cognitions..., feelings and sense of connectedness and fit, and behaviours”. Research made by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006, p. 87) suggests that products and brands that help a consumer to express oneself is more likely to evoke emotional feelings. These thoughts seem to complement each other, in the sense that brand love is associated with the feeling of connectedness (Batra et al., 2012, p. 6) and that a product that is self-expressive is assumedly used if the consumer feels connected to the product on some level (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 87).

One desirable outcome of brand love is brand loyalty (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306). It seems relevant to further examine the concept of brand loyalty because, as mentioned earlier, it helps companies achieve greater financial benefits (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1053). Carroll & Ahuvia (2006, p. 82) define brand loyalty as “the degree to which the consumer is committed to repurchase of the brand”. Gaining knowledge of brand loyalty is important for marketing managers because the degree of how often repeat purchases is made and how much that is bought of a specific product is determined by customer loyalty (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 40). Improving consumers’ loyalty to brands allows companies, in highly competitive environments, to secure a long-term and comfortable position within the marketplace (Amine, 1998, p. 305). According to Amine (1998, p. 305) there are various reasons that may explain a consumer’s behaviour when buying the same brand continuously. It might be due to factors such as loyalty to a store, small variety of products, lower price, etc. (Amine, 1998, p. 305). The consumers’ sensed benefits in relation with the brand are what lead to the consistent purchase of a brand (Amine, 1998, p. 306). Liu-Thompkins & Tam’s (2013, p. 21) research shows that not all repeat customers, making repeat purchases, are the same. Consumers may react differently to the same marketing incentives and it is not optimal to gather all high-value customers into one specific target segment (Liu-Thompkins & Tam, 2013, p. 34). Companies should instead recognize the factors and drivers of repeat purchases and accordingly design their marketing efforts (Liu-Thompkins & Tam, 2013, p. 34).

As constructs, brand loyalty and brand commitment can be thought of as being similar. However, there are differences between them (Martin & Goodell, 1991). Therefore we believe it is important to acknowledge brand commitment separately when researching

in the field of brand management. Brand commitment is said to be a result of brand love (Albert et al., 2009; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra et al., 2012). Just as brand commitment can be seen as similar to brand loyalty, brand love can also be seen as being similar to brand commitment. However, love is the feeling toward the brand and commitment is the willingness to stay in a relationship with the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 261). Brand commitment is built up of two components, the affective commitment component and the continuance commitment component (Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Fullerton, 2003, 2005). When a consumer expresses and feel an emotional connection to a brand the consumer is experiencing affective brand commitment (Evanschitzky et al., 2006 p. 1208; Fullerton, 2003, p. 334).

Albert & Merunka (2013, p. 259) argues that research should give emphasis to the consequences that occur when a consumer is experiencing brand love. In this context the consequences chosen are brand loyalty and brand commitment. There have also been arguments within earlier research stating that brand commitment should be considered as an antecedent to brand loyalty (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995; Iglesias et. al., 2011). As can be seen, outcomes of brand love have been widely researched. However, antecedents of brand love have not been researched to the same extent as these outcomes. Researchers have encouraged future studies to go more in depth on how brand love is created (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 263; Albert et. al., 2009, p. 306). Alignment between a company's brand identity and the consumers' brand images has been previously studied (Ross & Harradine, 2011). Ross & Harradine (2011) investigate the brand Tesco and how young consumers perceive this brand and investigate the possible misalignment between brand identity and brand image using the identity prism by Kapferer (2004). However, we are interested in the possibility that this alignment can be seen as a direct antecedent to brand love and consequently as an indirect antecedent to brand loyalty and brand commitment.

1.5 Research Gap

The majority of previous research has focused mainly on one group of stakeholders, the customers (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Sarkar et al., 2012). We acknowledge that it exists research where managers are taken into account as well regarding brand management. For instance in Cui et al. (2014) and Oeppen & Jamal (2014) the managers are considered. However, we feel as if studies including brand managers together with their customers are not given as much attention within the brand management research field as they should be. Interviewing managers at chosen clothing companies is a way for us to make a theoretical contribution. We believe that to include the managerial perspective is essential in order to better understand the relation that exists between the company, the brand and the customer.

An extensive part of brand management research has attended to antecedents and outcomes of brand love (Albert et al., 2009; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). However, emphasis has been on the outcomes of brand love. Previous researchers have acknowledged that further investigation as to how brand love commences is needed (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 263; Albert et. al., 2009, p. 306). We are interested in performing such an investigation. The term brand identity has individually been a widely researched subject, as well as the term brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Ghodeswar, 2008; Kapferer, 1997, 2004;

Nandan, 2005; Ross & Harradine, 2011; Roy & Banerjee, 2008). The alignment between these two terms has also been investigated (Nandan, 2005; Roy & Banerjee, 2008). However, the congruency between brand identity and brand image have not been connected to the term brand love. We recognize this as a gap in previous research and therefore we are intrigued to see whether or not this congruence can be thought of as an antecedent to brand love. Brand loyalty and brand commitment has been seen as an outcome of brand love (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306; Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 262). Congruence between brand identity and brand image has been recognized as a mean in creating greater loyalty (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). Regarding this fact, we want to increase knowledge on whether or not brand love can work as a facilitator between the above mentioned concepts.

A qualitative study will further explore the concept of brand love and enhance the theoretical field of brand management. Research previously performed concerning brand love has to a larger extent been made in a quantitative manner (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore we intend to conduct a qualitative research to further explore the subject. The gap that we intend to fill with this study is to increase the understanding of the relationship starting with brand identity and brand image, involving the notion of brand love and in the end resulting in brand loyalty and brand commitment. To address this gap we intend to take both the company and the customers' views within the Swedish clothing industry into consideration. The recognized research gap has led us to formulate our research question.

1.6 Research Question

How can brand love facilitate the development of brand loyalty and brand commitment through a congruent brand identity and brand image?

1.7 Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of brand love. Underlying this purpose, the aim is to see whether or not congruence between brand identity and brand image can work as an antecedent to brand love and indirectly its outcomes. By conducting a qualitative study we also aim to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the branding subjects: brand identity, brand image, brand love, brand loyalty and brand commitment. With this approach to our study we hope to increase knowledge on brand management, both in a theoretical and practical perspective.

2. SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we will define our philosophical standpoint in relation to our research and explain how we view reality and what we believe to be knowledge. The research approach and the research design of this study are then presented. We will end this chapter by explaining our pre-understandings of the subject of investigation and also provide insights on how we acquire literature in this thesis.

2.1 Ontology

The philosophical standpoint of ontology refers to how researchers view the world and its reality (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 130). The common notion is that there are two ontological positions, which either take into consideration the social actors as a determinant factor of deciding on reality or not (Bryman, 2012, p. 32; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 131). Saunders et al. (2012, p. 131) states that these two aspects of ontology are objectivism and subjectivism. Moreover, subjectivism is similar to a term named social constructivism in the sense that they both emphasize the role of social actors and its impact on the concept of reality (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). Morgan & Smircich (1980, p. 494) claims that social constructivism is a subjective approach to ontology. Thus it further connects the similarity between subjectivism and social constructivism. Social constructivism allows individuals to assert their own interpretations and meanings to entities and events (Creswell, 2013, pp. 24-25). Moreover, constructivism is a position that takes into consideration how the social actors can affect and change social reality on an on-going basis (Bryman, 2012, p. 34). Objectivism is an ontological view that does not consider social actors as having an influence on the existence of social entities (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 131). It is further indicating that social phenomena exist without relation to the social actors who live in that reality (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). An extreme explanation of objectivism is that researchers view the world as having a structure and researchers then aim at explaining the relationships between the variables building this structure (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 493).

Our philosophical stance is the social constructivism approach. We as authors of this thesis have the strong belief that reality is affected and can be created by the actions performed by social actors. Therefore, the social constructivism approach suits our perception of reality. Social constructivism suggests that social actors have an affect in how reality is built (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). The aim of this thesis is to see how managers are working towards increasing brand commitment and brand loyalty for their brand through brand love experienced by their consumers. Therefore we see the managers as social actors who themselves can affect their reality. Then we could also argue that brand love would be a social entity in this scenario. Further on, we also consider the consumers who are experiencing brand love as social actors within this research context. We consider that a relation between the marketing managers and the consumers as being a social construct, where both the managers can have an affect on the consumers as well as the consumers can have an affect on the managers. Bryman (2012, p. 33) emphasize that in a constructivism approach, social phenomena is subject to change. We believe that this further gives support for us adopting a social constructivism approach to how we as researchers view reality.

2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns what can be considered as acceptable knowledge and the main issue in this setting is whether or not principals and procedures used by natural scientists can and should be used when studying the social world (Bryman, 2012, p. 27; Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 59; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). There are three central orientations of epistemology: positivism, realism and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 134-137).

Researchers adopting the philosophy of positivism usually apply many of the techniques used by natural scientists (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15; Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 56) and only those phenomenon, that can be observed are seen as producing credible data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 134). Within the philosophical position of positivism, the role of research is to test hypotheses and to gather and provide knowledge for the development of laws (Bryman, 2012, p. 27-28). The research undertaken when adopting the positivist approach should in the best way possible be value-free; hence the researcher should not take a personal standpoint (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 134). The philosophy of positivism assumes that social reality is objective and singular, and that the act of investigating it has no impact on it (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 56). Positivism is also associated with quantitative methods of analysis, this because of the assumption that one can measure social phenomena (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 56). The main criticisms of positivism are that separating people from the social contexts in which they exist is impossible as well as the view that researchers are part of what they observe (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 56). This in the sense that, researchers own interest and values affect the research; hence they are not objective (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 56).

Realism shares two characteristics with the positivism approach (Bryman, 2012, p. 29). The philosophical position of realism is similar to that of positivism, in that it adopts a scientific approach to knowledge development (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 136), and the commitment that there is a reality separate from our portrayals of it (Bryman, 2012, p. 29). In other words, the view is that objects exists independent of the minds of humans (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 136). The core of realism is according to Saunders et al., (2012, p. 136) that “what we sense is reality”.

Interpretivism differs from the philosophical standpoints of positivism and realism in the sense that interpretivism emphasizes the difference between researching objects and human beings (Bryman, 2012, p. 28; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). Interpretivism developed as a result of the observed insufficiency of positivism in meeting the requirements of social scientists (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 56). It is important for the researcher, in the role of a social actor, to understand dissimilarities between people and it is essential that the researcher adopts an empathetic stance (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). The challenge is to understand the world from various human beings points of views (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). A belief among most interpretivists is that the researcher is involved in that, which is being researched, and they try to minimize the distance between the two (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 59-60). The belief is that social reality is shaped by our perceptions and therefore it is highly subjective (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 57). Interpretivism is associated with qualitative data and the use of small samples (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 62).

It is important to remember that the philosophical approach should be a reflection of your values and the same holds for your choice of techniques for the data collection (Saunders et al., 2012, p, 139). The development of our study follows the philosophy of interpretivism in the sense that we seek to understand marketing decisions made by marketing managers and how their decisions fits with the view of their customers of what is needed and what the customers prefer. Our choice of collecting qualitative data also suits our epistemological orientation of interpretivism. We believe that it is highly important to understand the differences between people and to see the world from various points of views. We also believe that we as researchers are part of what we are observing and that our own interest and values affect the research. Therefore, interpretivism best reflect our values and what we consider to be knowledge.

2.3 Research Approach

There are different research approaches that researchers can adopt depending on how they reason regarding theory at the beginning of research, and the research approach represents the link between theory and research (Bryman, 2012, p. 20; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 143). The choice of which research approach to take depends on what parts in the research that are considered more important, and it also depends on the characteristics of the research topic (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 148). There are two main research approaches: deductive approach and inductive approach (Bryman, 2012, p. 24; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 48). A third approach does also exist, an abductive approach, which encompasses characteristics from both the deductive and the inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 147; Peirce, 1903, p. 216).

A deductive approach is mostly associated with scientific research and aims at discovering causal relationships between different variables and to test a theory developed by the researchers themselves (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 145). A deductive approach starts however with developing hypotheses out of existing theory (Bryman, 2012, p. 24; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 125). These hypotheses are later tested during research and it must be possible to measure the data collected as well as to be able to generalize the findings to a wider context (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146). The role of theory and the hypothesis derived from theory is supposed to guide the data collection process (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 11). It is further said that when using a deductive approach within research, existing theory has allowed to influence which information to be collected and further on how to interpret the empirical findings (Patel & Davidsson, 2011, p. 23).

An inductive approach on the other hand, aims at allowing the empirical findings from research lead to the development of theoretical contribution (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 23). Another description of an inductive approach is to call it data driven because researchers with an inductive approach aims at investigating a topic and from the data collected be able to arrive at a theoretical explanation (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 48). An inductive approach is commonly used when conducting social science studies and such research is also more likely to take the context of the study into consideration (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146). This can also be seen as a disadvantage. Patel & Davidson (2011, p. 23) explains that the theoretical contribution might not be particularly generalizable since the empirical findings is collected from a specific situation or group of people, and therefore limits the scope of theory.

The third approach is then the abductive approach to research. An abductive research approach starts with exploring a startling phenomenon and then attempt to establish a plausible theory as to why this phenomenon has occurred (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 147). This type of research approach contains both elements of the deductive and the inductive approach (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 24). Research would then start with an inductive approach, this being a phenomenon from which researchers develop a hypothesis (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 24). Then it goes on to test this hypothesis on new cases, entering a deductive phase of research (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 24).

The research approach adopted in this thesis is the inductive approach. We made this choice in relation to our philosophical stances of both interpretivism and social constructivism. The common theme between the two philosophical stances is that it shows how we as researchers acknowledge the impact of human beings as social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 17; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). Also, Creswell (2013, p. 25) explains that researchers with a social constructivist view of reality are more likely to inductively perform studies to develop theory. This further gives support for our choice of using an inductive approach to our research. Moreover, we believe that the inductive research approach is most suited for this thesis since it matches our research design and the topic we wish to investigate most properly. A qualitative research design is often associated with an inductive research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13). Since we are not testing any hypothesis derived from earlier theory we are not using an approach that is consistent with the deductive approach. Rather, our research will lead to a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. This is consistent with what is said to be the outcome of inductive research according to Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 11). They explain that research findings are to complement the theory that the research commenced from (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 11). Also, the analysis of the empirical findings will result in the development of theory and a conceptual framework (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 146). As mentioned earlier, an inductive approach is also more likely to consider the context of the research, more so than a deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146). This adds to our perception that an inductive approach is most suitable for this study since we are aiming at investigating the marketing context in which both the managers and the customers can be found within.

2.4 Research Design

According to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 170) research can either be exploratory, explanatory or descriptive in its nature. An exploratory study wishes to look deeper into a specific subject in order to increase the understanding of the subject being studied (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 171). A descriptive study on the other hand wants to gain a clear picture of the studied subject and it wants to be able to conclude general patterns (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 171; 377). An explanatory study often aims at defining relationships between variables to be able to understand the subject being studied (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 172). Our study has an exploratory nature since we wish to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts present in our research question. An exploratory study also goes hand in hand with an inductive research approach (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 377).

Depending on researchers' philosophical stances and on how researchers connect theory with research, there are two research designs to choose from: quantitative and qualitative (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 26). Distinguishing between non-numerical data and numerical data is one way of differentiating the two designs (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 63; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 161). It is the style of our research question that mainly determines whether the research design is primarily qualitative or quantitative (Patel & Davidson, 2001, p. 14).

Adopting a quantitative approach to research design emphasizes quantification when collecting and analysing data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 26; Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 63). Data collection techniques such as a questionnaire and the use of graphs or statistics as a method of data analysis, is typical for quantitative research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 161). The philosophical stance of positivism is generally associated with quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 27; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 162). In quantitative research, the focus is on using collected data to test existing theories (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 162). Hence it is usually associated with a deductive approach to research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 162).

In contrast, a qualitative approach to research design rather emphasizes words when collecting and analysing data instead of quantification (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 27). Characteristics for qualitative research are that it studies the meanings of the participants and the relationship apparent between them, resulting in a development of a conceptual framework (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 163). According to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 163) researchers conducting qualitative research need to "make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied". Hence, it is associated with an interpretive philosophy (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 58; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 163). The emphasis within qualitative research is placed on the generation of theories and an inductive approach is therefore predominantly adopted (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 27). However, in reality, many business research designs are likely to combine elements of both a quantitative and a qualitative approach (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 161). This is called a mixed methods research design and quantitative and qualitative research may be combined in a variety of ways (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 166).

Within this thesis we have chosen to conduct a qualitative study. According to Creswell (2013, p. 47) qualitative research is conducted because "a problem or issue needs to be explored". We have found an area within branding that we believe is in need of further exploration; hence a qualitative research design suits our purpose. Moreover, the lack of qualitative studies within this area is also a valid reason for our choice to conduct such a study. A qualitative approach has better fit for our research problems in the sense that it allows us to gain a deeper knowledge and more detailed understanding of the subject in matter. As stated by Creswell (2013, p. 15) "A close tie does exist between the philosophy that one brings to the research act and how one proceeds to use a framework to shroud his or her inquiry". Since our philosophical standpoint is interpretivism and our approach to research is inductive, we deem having a qualitative research design as appropriate.

2.5 Pre-understandings

According to Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 414) pre-understandings refers to “the knowledge, insight, and experience that researchers have about the lived experience of their own organization”. Gummesson (1988, p. 55) on the other hand use the term pre-understanding in a wider sense than just knowledge and refer to the impact of the attitude of the researcher. Personal experiences are seen as an essential element when collecting and analysing information and the researcher must also exhibit theoretical sensitivity (Gummesson, 1988, p. 55). There are two forms of pre-understandings; first and second hand (Gummesson, 1988, p. 59). First hand pre-understandings are an individual’s own experiences gained both from private and working life (Gummesson, 1988, p. 59). Other people’s experiences communicated through intermediaries such as textbooks and research reports, constitutes the second hand pre-understandings (Gummesson, 1988, p. 60). Reflecting on our own first hand pre-understandings, we understand that they are limited. One of us has previously worked in a clothing store where two of our chosen brands, Boomerang and Björn Borg, were included in the product range. Referring to that position and the exposure to the brands on a daily basis, of course leads to certain pre-understandings of the brands in general. When it comes to the previous use of products from the different brands both authors have bought and used products from Fjällräven and Björn Borg so that could also be considered as having certain pre-understandings about the brands in question. One of us is also born and raised in the city of Örnsköldsvik, the town in which Fjällräven originates from and hence, certain pre-understandings regarding the brand has been developed throughout the years. With this in mind we still believe that we as authors of this thesis have limited previous knowledge that will influence the topic chosen. When it comes to the concepts used in this thesis, some of them have been heard of before throughout our education, in textbooks and articles, so some second hand pre-understandings exists but the models and frameworks used are all new ones that we have not been in contact with before.

In order to remain open-minded throughout a whole study, in both qualitative as well as quantitative research, researchers have to deal with their own assumptions (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001, p. 339). The findings might be reflected by something pre-existing in researchers understanding if they fail to do so (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001, p. 339). According to Nyström & Dahlberg’s (2001, p. 339) research, an individual, whether being a researcher or not, cannot fully be aware of its pre-understandings. Parts of a person’s pre-understandings may be unconscious or subconscious and hence, they might be hard to grasp (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001, p. 339). Gummesson (1988, p. 53) consider it necessary for an academic researcher to have worked within a company and that a lack of pre-understanding will lead the researcher having to spend substantial time gathering basic information. We understand that it is difficult to be fully aware of our pre-understandings concerning this study and that there might be certain things in our subconscious that we have no control over. However, for this study we have strived towards remaining open-minded throughout the whole writing process. We have, to the best of our ability, dealt with our assumptions in order for it not to affect our findings. Moreover, since our study follows the philosophy of interpretivism we believe, as mentioned previously, that we are part of what we are observing and that the research is affected by our own interest and values. Hence, it may be hard for our pre-understandings and assumptions not to affect our study.

2.6 Literature Search

There are two types of sources, primary and secondary (Scheuler, 2014, p. 163). A primary source is something directly accessible for researchers without report or analysis (Lombard, 2010, p. 252). A primary source is further defined as “the first occurrence of a piece of work” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 83). A secondary source on the other hand is when the researcher reads another person's analysis, when another one has had direct access to the data on which the source is based on (Lombard, 2010, p. 252). The main literature reviewed in this thesis is referred to as secondary sources. Secondary sources are such as journals and books (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 83). We have retrieved these resources through the online database Business Source Premier (EBSCO). We always made sure that the articles retrieved through EBSCO were peer reviewed. This was done in order to assure, in the best way possible, that the literature used in this thesis is of good quality and that our research question is developed based on valid information. Occasionally, we also used the search tool Google Scholar, but then made sure that the articles found through there were from reliable journals. To further assess the quality of the articles used in our theoretical framework we have tried, to the extent possible, to retrieve articles from well-known and respected journals within the respective field.

To assert the validity of our paper we have tried not to use secondary referencing and instead aimed at locating the original source. Occasionally, however seldom, we have found it necessary to use secondary referencing due to not being able to retrieve the original source. Further when reviewing the literature we have found it beneficial to search through the references of the read articles in order to find more research made on the subject. This has helped us discover important authors and contributions within the field.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on previous research made by researchers in the respective fields of expertise. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 70) emphasize that one important aspect of reviewing the literature is that it will help us form and develop our research question. Since the topic of our interest is brand management we have explored different subtopics within that field. These subtopics are brand identity, brand image, brand love, brand commitment and brand love. Exploring these subtopics have helped us with developing a research question that we found satisfying and that needed to be answered in order to further add to the research field of brand management.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter we will present previous literature and research previously conducted on subjects we are investigating in this thesis. We will begin with brand management and how brands are important to consider for managers. Following this section we move on to scrutinizing the literature of brand identity and brand image as antecedents to brand love, which is one core concept in this literature review. But before looking deeper into brand love we see it as necessary to start by explaining the key elements of emotional branding. We end this chapter with reviewing the literature of brand loyalty and brand commitment as outcomes of brand love.

3.1 Brand Management

Branding is a strategic tool used by managers to differentiate their company's brand on the market and to separate it from other companies' brands (Kapferer, 1997, p. 46; Keller, 1998, p. 2). A brand represents the qualities of the product and it is supposed to encapsulate the complete experience that the customer would have with the product (Keller & Lehman, 2006, p. 740). Mallik (2009, p. 3) further emphasizes that a brand is to entail the unique characteristics of the products associated with the brand. Brand management is then said to be the combination of being able to create and maintain a brand using different marketing techniques (Mallik, 2009, p. 4, p. 9). This is applied in order to increase brand equity (Mallik, 2009, p. 9). Brand equity is the value that can be earned from using a strong brand (Keller & Lehman, 2006, p. 740).

A brand represents a source of value for both the customer as well as the company (Kapferer, 1997, pp. 26-34). According to Kapferer (1997) the value of brands is connected to the level of risk: a strong brand removes the risk for both the consumer and the company. He further argues that a company with a strong brand have less risk of declining sales since a strong brand implies customer loyalty (Kapferer, 1997, p. 31). Keller (1998, p. 9) adds to this point by stating that customer loyalty towards a firm also makes it more difficult for competitors to enter the market, hence implying less risk for the firm. Moreover, the perceived risk for the customer is smaller when a strong brand is involved because of the opportunity loss the customer would experience if not purchasing the strong brand (Kapferer, 1997, p. 26). Keller (1997, pp. 8-9) further explains that the customer can use brands as a tool to decrease both functional and social risk.

Furthermore, a strong brand is important in other aspects as well. Farquhar (1989, pp. 25-26) stated two reasons as to why firms should aim at having strong brands. Firstly, a strong brand provides a solid platform to be able to construct new products and ideas (Farquhar, 1989, p. 25). In other words, a strong brand gives credibility to new product introductions or even sub-brands (Davis, 2002, p. 352). Secondly, a strong brand implies security for the firm in terms of being able to handle unexpected events such as changes in consumer preferences or other fluctuations in the market (Farquhar, 1989, p. 26). M'zungu et al. (2010, p. 606) explain that due to the increasing awareness of brands being financial assets for firms, brand managers need to focus on how to manage brands in order to create and maintain brand equity. They argue that being able to

safeguard brand equity is an essential part of strategic brand management and necessary in order to maintain long-term success for the brand (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 608).

The consideration of brand management as a strategic tool has been reflected upon previously as well. Urde (1999) emphasizes how brands should be acknowledged as strategic resources. He presents a conceptual framework called the brand hexagon (Urde, 1994, found in Urde, 1999, p. 125). At the centre of the brand hexagon are the core values of the brand and how the brand positions itself in relation to its competitors (Urde, 1999, p. 127). Other concepts that are emphasized in the framework in order to help the positioning of the brand are quality, personality and communication combined (Urde, 1999, p. 127). This framework originated from combining a brand pyramid with a company model (Urde, figure 4, 1994, p. 23). The brand pyramid explains the basics for creating a brand (Melin & Urde, 1991, found in Urde, 1994, p. 22). The brand pyramid consists of the target group, the trademark and the product, which in combination leads to the positioning of the brand (Urde, 1994, p. 22). Urde (1994, p. 25) then combines this brand pyramid with a company model that consists of three concepts: corporate name, corporate identity and brand vision. Combining these two models results in the brand-orientation company model, which is later, referred to as the conceptual framework brand hexagon (Urde, 1994, p. 25; Urde, 1991, p. 125).

Following the argumentation of Urde (1994, 1999) regarding brand orientation, M'zungu et al. (2010, p. 612) develop a theory called “the three-stage model of brand management to build and protect brand equity”. This model proposes three stages brand managers should go through in order to manage their brands strategically (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 612). The first step in this model regards integrating a brand orientation mind-set within the firm (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 612). This refers to treating the brand as a strategic asset and considering this in all activities they approach (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 612). Urde (1994, p. 27) urges that when adopting a brand orientation mind-set it is crucial to have coherent communication between the different parts of the company and the brands in order to be able to gain the profits of a strong brand. The second step is internal branding, which indicates that the people within the firm who delivers the brand shall feel close to the brand and be living the brand (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 612). This aligns with the brand vision representing the core of strategy for a brand-oriented company (Urde, 1994, p. 26). The last step of the three-stage model is consistent brand delivery, which is necessary in order for the customers to know what the brand stands for (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 613).

We consider a further investigation of brand management as relevant for our thesis. An understanding of what aspects there are to be considered when managing brands are to us important as a basis of information to build further knowledge on. We believe the clothing industry to be dynamic in its character and therefore argue that brand management is an essential aspect to consider within this context.

3.2 Brand Identity

Brand identity is an important concept in brand management (Kapferer, 1997, p. 91). From marketers' viewpoint, a brand is what they create for their consumers, but from the consumers' side, it is what they want to purchase (Roy & Banerjee, 2008, p. 142).

This has lead researchers to view a brand from two perspectives: brand identity and brand image (Roy & Banerjee, 2008, p. 142).

Brand identity is created on a comprehensive understanding of the company's business environment, customers and competitors (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 4). The pressure constantly put on brands nowadays is one factor explaining the urgent need to understand the concept of brand identity (Kapferer, 2004, p. 98; Ross & Harradine, 2011, p. 309). When a new brand is being innovated, other brands must catch up if they want to remain competitive on the market (Kapferer, 2004, p. 98). Similarities between the brands increase as companies' base their decisions on the same studies (Kapferer, 2004, p. 98). These similarities are evident in products produced and advertising campaigns being launched and in order to diversify companies need to know their brand's identity (Kapferer, 2004, p. 98). A brand's identity originates from the sender's side (Kapferer, 2004, p. 99). Brand identity conveys the characteristics of the brand, characteristics from a brand's heritage, which forms the brand to what it is (Kapferer, 2004, p. 102). With its brand identity, a company aims to express its individuality and uniqueness to its audience (Nandan, 2005, p. 265).

According to Urde (1999, p. 128) brand identity comprises a shared depiction or form, which answers the question "Who is the brand?" Brand identity is also seen as related to both the identity of the customers as well as the organization (Urde, 1999, p. 128). Urde (1999, p. 128) points out that it is needed for people within an organization to realize that brands provide an expression of a common identity as well as that brands can be used by consumers to express something about themselves and their roles. Roy & Banerjee (2008, p. 142) claim that brand identity is everything a company offers to its consumers and that it is the dream that it wants to sell. This may consist of everything from attributes, values, personality, differentiation and benefits of the brand, hence, the brand can be viewed as a personality, a product, a set of values as well as a position in the consumers' minds that it intends to occupy (Roy & Banerjee, 2008, p. 142).

Kapferer (2004, p. 107) presented brand identity in a framework called Brand Identity Prism, which shows the different facets of a brand. The hexagonal prism, representing the six facets of brand identity demonstrates the interrelationship between these facets and form a well-structured entity (Kapferer, 2004, p. 107, 111; Ponnam, 2007, p. 64). Dividing the prism into two halves is done by a horizontal line (Ponnam, 2007, p. 64). On the left hand side are facets that are part of externalization, those facets with attributes that are clearly visible (Ponnam, 2007, p. 64). On the right hand side are facets that belong to internalization and those that have attributes that without scrutiny cannot be perceived (Ponnam, 2007, p. 64). The first facet is the 'physique' of the brand (Kapferer, 2004, p. 107). A brand's physique is its backbone and what adds tangible value and without which it would not exist (Ponnam, 2007, p. 65). It is a combination of salient objective qualities, features immediately apparent when the brand is mentioned, or emerging features (Kapferer, 2004, p. 107). The second facet is the 'personality' of a brand (Ponnam, 2007, p. 65). By giving the brand a real or symbolic spokesperson or a figurehead a personality is easily created (Kapferer, 2004, p. 108, Ponnam, 2007, p. 66). A brand's 'culture', from which every product originates, is the third facet (Kapferer, 2004, p. 108). The culture is the set of values fostering a brand's inspiration and the facet refers to the basic principles governing the brand's communication and products (Kapferer, 2004, p. 108). The culture of a brand plays an essential role in the differentiation from other brands (Kapferer, 2004, p. 109).

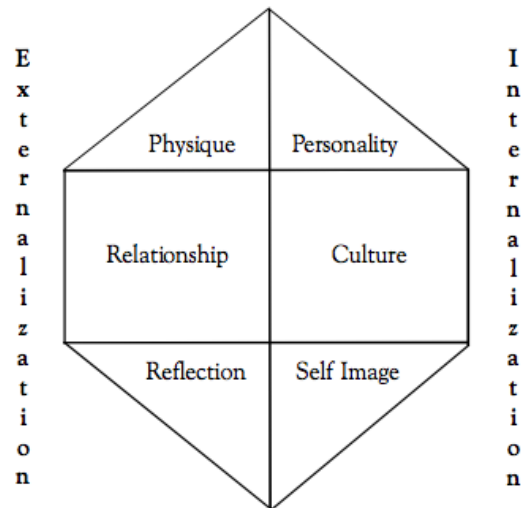


FIGURE 1. BRAND IDENTITY PRISM (KAPFERER, 1997, P. 100)

The fourth facet is the ‘relationship’ that a brand represents (Ponnam, 2007, p. 67). The relationship facet “defines the mode of conduct that most identifies the brand” (Kapferer, 2004, p. 110). The way the brand acts, how it relates to its customers and how it delivers services are all affected by the mode (Kapferer, 2004, p. 110). A brand is a ‘customer reflection’ and that is the fifth facet of the prism (Kapferer, 2004, p. 110). Customer reflection is how the customer wishes to be perceived as a result of using a brand (Kapferer, 2004, p. 110). The tendency to build a reflection or a certain image of the user will always be a part of a brand’s identity (Kapferer, 2004, p. 110; Ponnam, 2007, p. 69). The last facet of the Brand Identity Prism is that a brand speaks to people’s ‘self-image’ (Ponnam, 2007, p. 69). People’s attitude towards specific brands, help in developing a certain kind of internal bond with themselves (Kapferer, 2004, p. 111). Self-image works as the consumer’s own internal mirror where they might feel sporty or healthy when using a certain brand (Kapferer, 2004, pp. 110-111; Ponnam, 2007, p. 69). According to Kapferer (2004, p. 111) brands existence is dependent on whether they communicate or not, and this is the basic concept of the identity prism. One facet’s content echoes that of another and the prism supports our understanding of the core of brand identities (Kapferer, 2004, p. 111). Viot (2011, p. 214) carried out a study regarding the Brand Identity Prism in a context of sports brands such as Nike and Reebok for example. This study did not have a solely focus on the apparel products, but rather the complete brand awareness of these sport brands (Viot, 2011, p. 214). The focus within this study was to use the identity prism to investigate the fit between a brand and its product extensions (Viot, 2011, p. 214). It was concluded that the usage of brand identity could be beneficial in order to predict the customer acceptance of brand extensions (Viot, 2011, p. 224).

We believe that Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism can be used when trying to perceive the different brand identities among the companies we have chosen for our study. It provides us with an overview of the several elements within the concept of brand identity. Considering the investigation purpose of this thesis and additionally the research question we consider it essential for us to have an in-depth knowledge about

brand identity. Adding to our arguments of investigating brand management further in a clothing context, we also see that the notion of brand identity is essential to the clothing context as well.

3.3 Brand Image

When discussing brand management, identity is seen as a predecessor to image (Kapferer, 1997, p. 94). We must know precisely what we want to visualize before actually projecting an image to the public and the same holds for the fact that we must know what we wish to send and how to send it before it is acknowledged by the receiver (Kapferer, 1997, p. 94). For marketing managers, brand image has become a vital concept (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, p. 110).

Brand image occur on the receiver's, that is the consumer's, side (Kapferer, 2004, p. 98; Nandan, 2005, p. 266). The image refers to the way consumers decode the signals originating from a specific brand and how it is perceived (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 5; Kapferer, 2004, p. 98; Nandan, 2005, p. 267). Based on subjective perceptions of relation and thoughts that consumers have about a certain brand they ascribe an image to the brand (Nandan, 2005, p. 267; Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009, p. 84). Delivering brand image to a target market is an essential marketing activity (Park et al., 1986, p. 135). Research conducted by Dobni & Zinkhan (1990, p. 118) shows that brand image is not a concept inherent in the physical, functional or technical attributes of the product. It is rather affected and formed by marketing activities, by the perceiver's characteristics and by context variables (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, p. 118). The perception of reality is more important than the reality itself when it comes to brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, p. 118). With their normative research Park et al., (1986, p. 136) suggests that when companies select the type of needs necessary in developing brand images they should only select one need, this due to the fact that it may be difficult to manage a generic image. According to Roth (1992, p. 25) many brands apply a mix of symbolic, sensory and functional needs in their communication, and this due to increasingly competitive markets.

Consistency of the brand concept has to be stressed in order for a brand image to be understood by consumers (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). According to Park et al., (1986, p. 136) brand concept is a brand meaning, selected by the company and derived from basic consumer needs. If a consistent brand concept has been used for a long time, the linkage between identity and image will be increased (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). A strong link between brand identity and brand image is believed to lead to greater brand loyalty (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). When a certain brand image has been introduced, developed and strengthened, the time required to introduce and develop new products is reduced and the cost associated with it becomes lower (Park et al., 1986, p. 144). Nowadays, with the increase in competition, companies are compelled to make significant efforts in managing their brand image (Abosag & Farah, 2014, p. 2262).

From the information-processing view, it is when a stimulus from the environment is listened to, that the formation of a brand image structure starts (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009, p. 84). The stimulus is then stored in memory and depending on the nature of the stimulus, the formation of knowledge structures of the brand in memory is determined (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009, p. 84). Research by Srivastava & Kamdar (2009, p. 85)

shows that the higher the consumer's involvement in the product category, the more consistent will the brand image formation become. Involvement refers to the interest in or importance of, a product or service, communication, issue, etc. (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009, p. 86). A study conducted by Dolich (1969, p. 80) shows that consumer choice is related to how product or brand images matches self-images. Results of their study display that greater similarity between self-concept and brand images appear when the brand image is preferred (Dolich, 1969, p. 84). Brands that were favoured were coherent with the self-concept and, hence, reinforced it (Dolich, 1969, p. 84).

A marketer's main task is to identify the gap between brand identity and brand image and to integrate the two in order to minimize the gap and succeed in creating a lasting bond with the consumers (Roy & Banerjee, 2008, p. 142). We find it relevant to consider the concepts brand identity and brand image further since it will help us in answering our research question. Like mentioned previously it is shown that the choice of brand for a consumer is related to how the image of the brand or product actually matches the self-images of the consumers (Dolich, 1969, p. 80). We consider an investigation of these two concepts within a clothing retail context as appropriate due to the importance that these concepts have in creating a brand-customer relationship. Our reasoning is that such an investigation is relevant to apply to clothing brands as well as any other brands. It is also shown that emotional preferences are involved even in the outmost reasonable explanations for consumers' choice of brands (Travis, 2000, p. 10). With this in mind we find it essential for our study to further look into the emotional aspect of branding and we will do so when covering the concept of emotional branding in the next section of this chapter.

3.4 Emotional Branding

Today we live in a hypercompetitive marketplace where it is no longer sufficient to retain existing consumers or markets by providing decent goods or services (Gobé, 2009, p. xviii). Nowadays, the key to success is dependent on the ability to understand people's emotional needs and desires (Gobé, 2009, p. xviii). Travis (2000, p. 3) states, "buying decisions are made on promises that transcend products, and promises are rooted in human emotions". The essence of a brand is more about focusing on what customers actually want rather than what the company itself is able to produce (Travis, 2000, p. 3). To present a uniform appearance to the world, companies need a consistent use of their names and logos (Travis, 2000, p. 4). However, neither a name nor a logo is what constitutes a brand (Travis, 2000, p. 4). What makes the value of the brand is the meaning behind these symbols and the feelings they generate (Travis, 2000, p. 4). According to Travis (2000, p. 9) the crucial question is how your customers feel about your brand. Consumers want a relationship with brands that understand them and their unique needs (Gobé, 2009, p. 29-30). How your association with a brand makes you feel is what brings power to a specific brand and even the most rational reasons for your choice of brand translates into emotional preferences (Travis, 2000, p. 10).

Thomson et al. (2005) provided the influential empirical work on emotional attachment to brands. Drawing from attachment theory, they define emotional brand attachment as an emotional bond between a person and a specific brand (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 78). A bond characterized by feelings of connection, passion and love (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 78). The original work on attachment stems from the field of psychology and Bowlby

(1979) who developed the Attachment Theory. According to this theory, attachment behaviour is any kind of behaviour involving emotions, in the end resulting in a specific bond between a person and another individual (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129). It is a basic human need to make strong emotional attachments to specific others, especially evident during early childhood, beginning from a child's attachment to his or her parents (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129) and continuing characterizing human beings in the adult stage through romantic relationships (Simpson, 1990; Simpson et al., 2007).

Previous research conducted by Grisaffe & Nguyen (2011) shows upon antecedents of emotional attachment to brands. An important mean in realizing customer repurchasing is the successful facilitation of strong emotional attachment to brands (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012, p. 291), and to evoke such a repurchase there are three critical issues that needs to be addressed by marketers (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1052). Initially, the type of emotional brand attachment needs to be clearly defined (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1052). Secondly, the antecedent drivers of these emotional bonds need to be identified (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1052). Thirdly, marketers must decide which antecedents that are controllable (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1052). By using qualitative methods, Grisaffe & Nguyen (2011, p. 1052) were able to uncover five primary antecedents of emotional attachment to brands. These five discovered antecedents were superior marketing characteristics, traditional customer outcomes, user-derived benefits, sentimentality/emotional memory and socialization (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1053). Superior marketing characteristics (e.g. effective advertising, excellent pricing and service, and availability) and traditional customer outcomes (e.g. perceived value and customer satisfaction) are linked in the sense that the first produces the latter, and the chain that is being developed can produce emotional attachment (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1055). Strong attachments are formed when user-derived benefits, such as helping consumers achieve self- or social oriented goals or sensory pleasure, are derived from brands (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1056). Socialization, including family traditions, also produces emotional brand attachment (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1056). Sentimental/emotional memory is the fifth and final antecedent resulting in emotional attachments when brands evoke nostalgic memories of experiences, people or for example places (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1057). When looking into the degree of emotional attachment that the customers hold against a certain brand we will take some of the above-mentioned antecedents in consideration.

A way to create this emotional bond is to match the personality of the brand with the consumer's self (Malär et al., 2011, p. 35). Aaker (1997, p. 347) defines brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand". However, whether the personality of the brand should match the consumer's ideal or actual self is a key question (Malär et al., 2011, p. 35). Sirgy (1982, p. 287) defines actual self as "how a person perceives herself" and ideal self is defined as "how a person would like to perceive herself". The concept of 'self-congruence' is a key notion in investigating this dilemma (Malär et al., 2011, p. 35). Khan (2010, p. 9) defines self-congruity as "the degree of similarity between consumer's self-image or self concept and that of a brand". Self-congruity is also known as brand identification (Sirgy et al., 1997, p. 229). This can be noticed in the definition Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006, p. 49) provide of brand identification, namely "the extent to which the consumer sees his or her own self-image as overlapping with the brand's image". We find brand personality as an important notion to consider when discussing emotional attachment, however, the main focus in this thesis will be on brand identity and brand image. Moreover, we see a connection

between brand personality and brand image. Brand image is included in the definition of brand identification as defined by Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006, p. 49). Therefore, we believe that brand image is similar to brand personality and the possibility exists of investigating self-congruity in the clothing retail context.

The combination of how emotional brand attachment can be created together with the impact brand identification have on the creation of brand attachment, have led us to consider emotional branding as an essential concept in this thesis. Based on this argumentation we also find emotional branding as having valid importance within the clothing industry. Our reasoning is based on the dynamic nature that we associate the clothing industry with. According to research conducted by Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010, p. 514) brand identification is shown to be an antecedent of brand love. Therefore we believe that brand love is a relevant subject to be discussed further and we will do so in the following section.

3.5 Brand Love

Many studies have been conducted on the concept of brand love, and definitions of brand love differ between different researchers. One of the first studies on brand love incorporated the concept of love that can exist between people into the relation between a person and an object (Shimp & Madden, 1988, p. 163). When doing so, they adopted the Sternberg's Triangular theory of Love (Sternberg, 1986; Shimp & Madden, 1988). This theory states that love is made up of three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). Intimacy refers to the closeness and warmth that can be felt within a relationship (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). The component of passion refers to the physical drives that lead to arousal (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). The third component, decision/commitment, refers to the decision to be committed to a loving relationship (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). Based on Sternberg's Triangular theory of Love, Shimp & Madden (1988, pp. 165-166) developed a conceptual framework explaining the object-person relationship and they derived eight different kinds of love, ranging from non-liking to loyalty.

To further emphasize the increasing awareness regarding brand love, the practitioner Roberts (2004) talked about how important it is for brand managers to pay attention to brand love. A study performed by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006, pp. 86-87) resulted in advising managers to consider brand love as a strategic tool to gain desirable post-purchase behaviour from consumers. Their way of defining brand love is that it refers to the behaviour of satisfied consumers after they have purchased the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 79). Carroll & Ahuvia (2006, p. 81) further developed this definition of brand love as the level of emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has with the brand. However, there are differing views as to whether or not it is appropriate to say that love, as an interpersonal construct, can be applied to brands and consumer behaviour. As mentioned above, theories of interpersonal love have been applied and stated to have the ability to explain consumer-object relationships (Shimp & Madden, 1988; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Other researchers argue that love is a construct that is too complex to be applied to consumer behaviour (Batra et al., 2012; Albert et al., 2009). Batra et al. (2012, p. 2) argued that brand love should firstly be based on the customer's experience and thereafter connections to interpersonal theory can be made. Further on, Batra et al. (2012, p. 2) stated that previous research had begun with focus

on one interpersonal theory. Based on that theory, researchers had then developed a scale of brand love instead of exploring the topic in an open-ended manner (Batra et al., 2012, p. 2). Despite of this, Batra et al. (2012, p. 6) did not suggest that researchers should neglect interpersonal theory altogether when researching brand love. The advice was rather that researchers should be careful not to include unnecessary elements from interpersonal theory when conducting brand love research (Batra et al., 2012, p. 6).

Not only have researchers within the field of brand love tried to conceptualise brand love, but they have also investigated the possibility of measuring brand love (Albert et al., 2009; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Albert et al. (2009, p. 305) developed two brand love scales and, despite of their own criticism towards using interpersonal theories of love when investigating brand love, they arrived at the conclusion that brand love is similar to interpersonal love. With these brand love scales Albert et al. (2009, p. 306) foresee three positive outcomes of brand love: trust, positive word of mouth, and loyalty. Batra et al. (2012, pp. 12-13) investigate the strength of brand love and one result of their study is their higher-order prototype model that includes seven elements. These elements are passion-driven behavior, self-brand integration, positive emotional connection, anticipated separation distress, long-term relationship, positive attitude valence and attitudes held with high certainty and confidence (Batra et al., 2012, pp. 12-13). Batra et al. (2012, p. 13) argued that this model allows for the assessment of which components can strengthen and weaken the felt love for a brand, depending on the situation at hand. Another measurement method is brought forward by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006, p. 87) who introduced a multi-item measure that uses brand love both as a predictor variable and an outcome variable. In general, we can conclude that there is several ways to research and measure brand love.

Albert & Merunka (2013, p. 259) also stated that research focused on brand love, has been to conceptualise it, rather than to look into the antecedents and outcomes of brand love. Others have identified few outcomes of brand love, such as loyalty or positive word of mouth (Albert et al., 2009; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). However, this is not sufficient enough according to Albert & Merunka (2013). Consequently, Albert & Merunka (2013, p. 260) proposed a model where brand love is a multidimensional construct where both antecedents and outcomes of brand love are taken into consideration. Within this model another identified outcome of brand love was stated to be brand commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 262). Moreover, within this model, antecedents such as reliability and honesty were said to influence brand love positively (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 262). Also, a study performed by Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010, p. 514) found brand identification and sense of community as antecedents of brand love. However, further exploration of what antecedents of brand love there are and how brand love commences is needed according to researchers (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 263; Albert et al., 2009, p. 306).

The research made by Batra et al. (2012) receives some critique from Romaniuk (2013). She criticizes their attempt of measuring brand love and questions if it is meaningful. Romaniuk (2013, p. 185) is further sceptical about the importance of investigating brand love, since she claims that most consumers are not particularly devoted to the brands that they buy. Moussa (2015) also gives some critique towards the increased interest in brand love. Moussa (2015) argues that brand love is another word for brand attachment. In addition to this, he recommends managers to be cautious with investing in brand love (Moussa, 2015, p. 80). The arguments provided for this is that there is no

evidence that increased attention to brand love will lead to increased sales and market share (Moussa, 2015, p. 80).

Despite of the criticism provided by both Romaniuk (2013) and Moussa (2015) on the concept of brand love, we still believe that brand love is a relevant theme to discuss in this thesis. A solid reason for us discussing brand love is the aim of this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, we intend to further investigate the congruence between brand identity and brand image and if in such a situation brand love is also experienced. This potential connection is further based on research conducted on brand identity and brand image. It is stated that in order to create a consistent bond between brand and consumers, brand identity and brand image need to be coherent with each other (Roy & Banerjee, 2008, p. 142). In relation to this, brand identification has been seen as an antecedent to brand love (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010, p. 514). This clearly shows our reasoning of how we choose brand love as a central theme and how we believe it to be connected to brand identity and brand image. Moreover, brand love can be a predecessor to brand loyalty (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306). This fact supports our choice of brand love as one of the main themes of this thesis. We choose to view brand love as a portal, which customers must experience in order to later on develop brand commitment and brand loyalty. This makes brand love an essential theme in our thesis.

As mentioned earlier in this section, previous studies have been able to identify several positive outcomes of brand love. One of these is brand loyalty (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306). We reason that brand loyalty is a relevant subject to discuss further in this thesis and will do so in the following section.

3.6 Brand Loyalty

It has long been studied how to create brand loyalty among customers and there is a great amount of research performed in the area (Amine, 1998; Kumar & Shah, 2004; Liu-Thompkins & Tam, 2013). Most managers today view profitability as the utmost significant factor in the survival of their business (Reichheld et al., 2000, p. 135). According to research conducted by Reichheld et al. (2000, p. 135) the importance of loyalty in retailing cannot be highlighted enough as it has been discovered that a five percentage point increase in customer retention (i.e. loyalty) can lead to an increase in company profit by up to 25-100% (Reichheld, 2000, p. 135). Loyalty also leads to growing revenues and market share as the top customers repeatedly purchase products and give recommendations (Reichheld et al., 2000, p. 135). By having loyal customers and not having to replace old ones, reduces the cost of acquiring and serving new customers (Ndubisi, 2004, cited in Ndubisi, 2006, p. 48; Reichheld, 2000, p. 135). To be able to improve and increase the number of loyal customers it is important that customers and retailers learn how to interact with one another (Brosdahl, 2013, p. 110). A good interaction will also lead to decreased costs for both parties (Brosdahl, 2013, p. 110; Ndubisi, 2006, p. 49).

Previous research shows upon antecedents contributing to loyalty (Amine, 1998; Brosdahl, 2013; Li & Petrick, 2008). There are several factors that contribute to customer loyalty and developing trusted relationships between retailers and their customers have always been assumed to be essential in developing loyalty (Brosdahl, 2013, p. 111). This notion is supported by research conducted by Ndubisi (2006, p. 56)

showing that before retailers can expect loyalty to be exhibited by customers, trustworthiness such as giving and keeping promises, showing respect and fulfilling obligations must be developed. Another variable that has been found to be important in developing brand loyalty is consumer satisfaction (Li & Petrick, 2008, p. 26, Amine, 1998, p. 311). Amine (1998, p. 311) stated that antecedents of brand loyalty can be separated into two different types: indirect and direct sources. Achieving brand loyalty through mediating variables such as involvement and satisfaction are seen as caused by indirect antecedents, whilst perceived risk, brand attachment and perceived differences among alternatives are seen as direct sources which thoroughly affect brand loyalty (Amine, 1998, p. 311). Based on previous research we believe that customer loyalty and brand loyalty are interchangeable terms based on how they both refer to customer attachments to products.

Research conducted by Singh & Pattanayak (2014, p. 49) on the impact of brand loyalty on consumers' sportswear brand purchase, showed that factors such as brand name, product quality, price and store environment are relevant factors contributing to brand loyalty. There are so many different brands available in the marketplace and this often leads to confusion for the customers (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 42). Hence, to avoid confusion consumers prefer to trust brands whose names are well known (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 42). Many consumers buy a specific brand because of the quality of the product offered (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 42; Yuen & Chan, 2010, p. 227). The noticeable quality of a sold product leads either to repeat purchase of the brand or to a change of brand (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 42). Product quality is also believed to be the starting point for the creation of customer loyalty (Yuen & Chan, 2010, p. 227). Price may be the most central factor for average consumers concern (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 42). If consumers have built and are experiencing loyalty towards a brand their purchase intention is less likely to be affected by its price (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 42; Vázquez Casielles & Álvarez Álvarez, 2007, p. 124). A positive store location, interior design and stimulus effects such as noise, temperature and product displays in store are part of the store environment that affects brand loyalty (Singh & Pattanayak, 2014, p. 43).

According to Rundle-Thiele & Bennett (2001, p. 29) measuring brand loyalty is different for distinctive markets such as consumable, durable and service markets. This because of differences in market characteristics such as purchase frequency, involvement, brand switching and habit (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 29). Characteristics of loyalty being divided, is exhibited by the consumable markets and often referred to as multi-brand purchasing (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 29). Switching brands in search of variety, lack of availability (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 29-30), sales promotions (Chandon, 1995, p. 424) are various reasons for multi-brand purchase in consumable goods. When purchasing durable goods such as furniture and motor vehicles consumers do not repeatedly switch back and forth between brands (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 30), this due to being loyal to a brand for a given time period because of long replacement cycles (Che & Seetharaman, 2009, p. 494). In a service market consumers could be considered completely loyal due to typically having 100 per cent share of category with a certain brand (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 31). Risks are also perceived higher in services than in goods and consumers are therefore less likely to switch brands (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 31).

Previous research shows that brand loyalty can be measured and defined as either behavioural or attitudinal (Amine, 1998, p. 306; Liu-Thompkins & Tam, 2013, p. 21; Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001, p. 26). According to the behavioural approach, consumer loyalty is being expressed through the repeat purchasing of a specific brand (Amine, 1998, p. 306). The attitudinal approach on the other hand regards the regular buying of a brand as necessary but not sufficient in achieving true brand loyalty (Amine, 1998, p. 306). A positive attitude must also be added according to the attitudinal perspective for the behaviour to be pursued regularly (Amine, 1998, p. 306; Liu-Thompkins & Tam, 2013, p. 23). However, even though the behavioural approach of loyalty is useful and easy to measure through scanning data, this view of brand loyalty is less explanatory and predictable (Amine, 1998, p. 307). This due to, not enabling researchers to differentiate the various buying situations and individual motives, which may influence consumers' to purchase the same brand (Amine, 1998, p. 307; Liu-Thompkins & Tam, 2013, p. 21). To distinguish true brand loyalty from false loyalty, measurements of brand loyalty therefore advanced to include some attitudinal measurements instruments besides the behavioural indicators (Amine, 1998, p. 307). The upstream approach, that is the attitudinal approach, to brand loyalty is based on identifying the motives that consumers have behind developing true brand loyalty (Amine, 1998, p. 309). Behavioural loyalty is important for companies in generating profitability whilst attitudinal loyalty assist companies in building an undetectable exit barrier for their customers (Kumar & Shah, 2004, p. 322). The attitudinal approach will be the basis for our investigation on consumers' brand loyalty in this thesis since we believe it to be relevant in our study to investigate the feelings behind the loyalty as experienced by the consumers.

Connecting loyalty to our study, we believe that clothing retailers can be considered part of the consumable market. Rundle-Thiele & Bennett (2001, p. 29) explain that within a consumable market multiple brands are purchased, implying that loyalty is divided within this market. We therefore believe this shows upon the importance of gaining further understanding into the concept of brand loyalty within the clothing industry. Developing brand loyalty among consumers seems even more important to achieve in the context that we are researching. Therefore, we view it as highly relevant for our study to research what factors are leading to the development of brand loyalty and how it can be connected to brand love. Vlachos & Vrechopoulos (2012, pp. 220; 225) carried out a study based on both attachment theory and brand love, and concluded that loyalty could be achieved by creating emotional ties with customers. This study was focused on the customer-retailer relationship in a grocery-retailing context and it was conducted through the use of survey studies (Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012, pp. 218-219). We see that there is a need to investigate the link between brand love and brand loyalty by conducting qualitative research in order to develop a deeper understanding of both topics. By investigating if such emotional ties among customers are connected to brand loyalty within the clothing industry, would further deepen the knowledge of both brand love and brand loyalty.

3.7 Brand Commitment

Just as loyalty is said to be an outcome of brand love, so is brand commitment (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306; Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 262). To enhance the understanding of the importance of brand love we believe it is essential to consider brand commitment as

well as brand loyalty and will do so in this section. Brand love is said to have a strong influence on brand commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 262). We therefore believe this gives supportive argument for considering both brand love and its relation with brand commitment in this thesis.

Evidently, it has been found that brand love can lead to beneficial outcomes for companies (Albert et al., 2009; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). One such outcome is brand commitment (Albert et al., 2009; Batra et al., 2012). Commitment is a widely researched area and it has been researched in the field of organizational behaviour, consumer behaviour and relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Fullerton, 2003, 2005; Martin & Goodell, 1991). Martin & Goodell (1991) explain that brand commitment is related to brand loyalty, although they are not the same. To a larger extent, brand loyalty refers more to the behaviour of the consumer and how often they repurchase the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Singh & Pattanayak, 2014). Brand commitment instead refers to the willingness of the consumer to have a long-term relationship with the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 261; Evanschitzky et al., 2006, p. 1208). It has been increasingly acknowledged that commitment involves cognitive and affective components (Martin & Goodell, 1991, p. 54). This is essentially shown within the consumption relationship when the consumer experiences an emotional attachment to the other party (Fullerton, 2003, p. 334).

The relation between brand commitment and brand loyalty has been looked at from other angles than simply their similarities. Iglesias et al. (2011, p. 578) performed a study that supported their statement of affective commitment being a mediator between brand experience and brand loyalty, hence affective commitment is an antecedent of brand loyalty in that scenario. Bloemer & Kasper (1995, p. 314) emphasized the importance of commitment in the sense of it being a crucial antecedent if true brand loyalty is to occur. As mentioned above, commitment has been researched both in terms of relationship marketing as well as in terms of organizational psychology (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Allen & Meyer, 1990). It can be seen in the literature that commitment is a complex structure and it consists out of both attitude and behavioural parts (Martin & Goodell, 1991, p. 53). In the field of organizational psychology, Allen & Meyer (1990) developed a three-component model of commitment and labelled the components of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Gruen et al. (2000, p. 37) defined both affective and continuance commitment on the basis of the individual's psychological bond with the organization. The difference between the two constructs of commitment is whether or not the psychological bond is based on the favourable feeling the individual has towards the organization or if it is based on the perceived cost of leaving the organization (Gruen et al., 2000, p. 37). The third component, the normative commitment, is defined by Allen & Meyer (1990, p. 1) as "feelings of obligation to remain with the organization". However, recent marketing research on commitment within a brand-consumer relationship have only taken into consideration two of these components, them being the affective and the continuance component of commitment (Evanschitzky, 2006; Fullerton, 2003, 2005). Affective commitment is focused on emotionality, and continuance commitment has a more economic focus (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Building on the work of Allen & Meyer (1990), marketing researchers have carried on investigating brand commitment using the affective commitment component and continuance commitment component (Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Fullerton, 2003, 2005).

Fullerton (2003, p. 334) exemplified that affective commitment is what happens when a customer expresses love for a brand. Evanschitzky et al. (2006, p. 1208) further exemplified affective commitment by stating that customers who identify themselves with a brand and feel strong emotional connection with the brand experience affective commitment. Fullerton (2011, p. 94) states that the normative commitment has not been acknowledged enough in marketing relationships. Despite of this, brand commitment is said to be composed of the affective commitment and continuance commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 260). Also, Fullerton (2003) concludes that both affective commitment and continuance commitment should be acknowledged.

Previous research has looked closer at brand commitment as a part of the consumer-brand relationship (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Fullerton, 2005). Albert & Merunka (2013) explored the relation between brand trust and brand commitment, as an antecedent and an outcome of brand love respectively. Trust and commitment were as constructs also examined in the field of relationship marketing by Morgan & Hunt (1994). Morgan & Hunt (1994) developed a model called the trust-commitment model. They argued for commitment being a central construct in order to achieve relationship-marketing success, and they referred to commitment as relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22). Furthermore, Albert & Merunka (2013) developed the trust-commitment model in an encompassing manner, which included the concept of brand love and referred to commitment as brand commitment.

Brand commitment, is said to be connected with both brand love (Albert et al., 2009; Batra et al., 2012) and brand loyalty (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995, p. 314; Iglesias et al., 2011, p. 578; Martin & Goodell, 1991). Therefore, we believe brand commitment to be of significance in this thesis. Since the purpose of this thesis is to gain an increased knowledge of the antecedents and outcomes of brand love, a further investigation of brand commitment is needed. Brand commitment is also said to be an outcome of brand love in previous research (Albert et al., 2009; Batra et al., 2012). Therefore, it is relevant to emphasize brand commitment as one of the outcomes investigated in this thesis. In addition to this, we also argue for an investigation of brand commitment as being relevant in the context of the clothing industry.

3.8 Summary of Theoretical Framework

All the concepts mentioned and explored previously in this chapter are connected to one another. Brand management can be referred to as a general gathering point for where brand image, brand identity, emotional branding, brand love, brand loyalty and brand commitment are included. Acknowledging brands as strategic resources is essential in marketing (Urde, 1999). We believe that in order to do this it is important for marketers to fully understand their brands. Our understanding is that brand identity and brand image are the cornerstones of a brand and therefore it is relevant to investigate these concepts more closely. Basically, the brand identity is the company's view of their brand (Nandan, 2005, p. 264) and the brand image is the customer's view of the brand (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009, p. 84). If a strong link exists between the brand's identity and image it is believed to lead to increased brand loyalty (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). Loyalty in turn can be seen as an outcome of brand love (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306). Brand love can lead to brand commitment; hence both commitment and loyalty are outcomes of brand love (Albert et al., 2009, p. 306; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

However, even though brand commitment is viewed as being related to brand loyalty, they are not the same (Martin & Goodell, 1991). Loyalty is more about the consumer behaviour and repurchase of the brand, whilst commitment on the other hand is the consumer's inclination towards having a long-term relationship with the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 261; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). One form of commitment, so called affective commitment is what develops when a customer expresses love for a brand (Fullerton, 2003, p. 334). Affective commitment is further explained as what customers experience when they identify themselves with a specific brand and develop a solid emotional connection towards that brand (Evanschitzky et al., 2006, p. 1208). So without emotional branding, without this emotional connection, customers will not be able to develop love towards a brand, let alone feel committed and become loyal towards the brand. As can be seen here, these concepts follow each other and form a sequential ladder. Starting at the bottom step with brand management leading up to brand loyalty and brand commitment.

We are further interested in exploring the links between some of these concepts more thoroughly. We are interested in looking at the links between the antecedents of brand love and the link between brand love and its outcomes in a consumable market context. In our study this context is the Swedish clothing industry. With the antecedents chosen, being brand identity and brand image, we hope to bring deeper understanding in whether or not a congruence with these have stronger impact on brand love and in turn brand loyalty and brand commitment. To increase our understanding of this possible congruence we have chosen to conduct interviews with both marketing managers of Swedish clothing brands as well as reached out to customers of these brands. Our expectation is that by investigating the links between these concepts in a qualitative manner we will be able to advance research on brand love. We intend to make a theoretical contribution to research on how brand love commences and if a congruency between brand image and brand identity can facilitate the creation of brand love.

4. PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explain how we have conducted our study and the argumentation for our specific choices. This chapter includes the different aspects and parts of the data collection. Finally, we will state the ethical aspects to take into consideration when conducting research and how we have acknowledged these during the process of data collection.

4.1 Data Collection Methods

It is important to decide upon what kind of data to collect depending on the type of research being conducted (Saunders et al., 2012). The choice is whether to use primary data or secondary data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 304). Primary data is new data collected for the specific study being conducted (Hair et al., 2003, p. 72; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 304). The other type of data, secondary data, is data which originally have been collected with another study in mind but that is still used as a basis for analysis in the study currently being conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 312; Hair et al., 2003, p. 72; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 304). According to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 307) secondary data is used primarily when conducting descriptive and explanatory research. Descriptive research is conducted when the purpose is to produce a correct representation of persons, situations or events whilst explanatory research is conducted when the aim is to explain relationships between various variables by studying a situation or a problem (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 171-172). Both qualitative and quantitative data are included in secondary data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 307). Market reports, annual reports, billing records, sales invoices and previous strategic planning documents are all examples of secondary data (Hair et al., 2003, p. 73; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 304-305). However, there are both advantages and disadvantages with the use of secondary data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 313; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 317). The main advantages are that secondary data is usually less expensive and not as time consuming as primary data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 313; Hair et al., 2003, p. 72). If you are under time constraints, secondary data may be the best alternative, as it will provide you with more time for data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 320; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 318). A limitation of secondary data is that it has been collected with another purpose in mind that differs from the study conducted at hand and it may therefore not fit your research question or your objectives (Hair et al., 2003, p. 72; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 319). Another disadvantage is the lack of familiarity with the data (Hair et al., 2003, p. 73). Data collected by others does not provide the same level of familiarity as data that you, yourself, have collected and it may take some time to grasp the data if the dataset is large and complex (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 320).

There are various ways of collecting qualitative primary data, for example participant observation and interviews (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 340, 372). Participant observation is observation conducted by researchers who attempt to fully participate in the lives and activities of the specific research subjects and hence becoming a member of their group (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 342). Interviews are conversations between two or more people in an attempt to explore a research subject further, to gather valid and reliable data that can help researchers answer their research question (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 372). However, collecting primary data using one of the above-mentioned ways can be

very costly as well as very time consuming and can therefore be considered to be disadvantages (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 312). Time and financial resources are two aspects which students in particular may not have access to (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 312). An advantage with collecting primary data is that since you have collected it on your own, you are extremely familiar with every little piece of your data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 320).

With this in mind we view it as necessary for us to collect primary data. We believe that by only using secondary data that is available we will not be able to answer our research question. We want to investigate how brand love can facilitate the development of brand loyalty and commitment through a congruent brand identity and brand image, looking into both the company and the customers' views. Since this has not been fully studied before we must collect primary data in order to gain a deeper understanding. We came to the conclusion and decided upon using interviews for our collection of primary data because we view interviews as a beneficial approach to be able to explore and reach a deeper understanding as a means in answering our research question. We are aware that it will require more time and that it might be more costly to collect primary data, but we still view it as highly necessary in order to answer our research question.

4.2 Qualitative Data Collection

There are many types of interviews that can be used in collecting primary data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 465; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 374). The type of interview being conducted, need to match and be consistent with the stated research question and objectives as well as the purpose of the research and the adopted research strategy (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 372). In qualitative research there are two main types of interviews: unstructured and semi-structured (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 465). Unstructured interviews are informal interviews where the questions are not predetermined but there is a clear idea about aspects that you want to explore in depth (Hair et al., 2003, p. 138; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 375). The interviewer might only ask one single question and the interviewee is then allowed and given the opportunity to talk freely about the topic in question (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 375). Semi-structured interviews on the other hand include a list of themes and pre-determined questions, often referred to as an interview guide, to be covered by the interviewer (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). The use of this interview guide may vary from interview to interview and questions not stated in the guide may be asked as follow up questions when the interviewer finds something, said by the interviewee, interesting (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467; Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 374-375).

For our study, we have used semi-structured interviews. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 171) explain a study with an exploratory style as a way to be able to discover and gain an understanding about a certain topic by asking open questions. Our study has an exploratory approach in the sense that we wish to gain insight into and to become familiar with the subject area in question, as well as to look for patterns and develop a deeper understanding. Therefore, we believe that semi-structured interviews containing fairly open questions, will best help us in answering our research question. With semi-structured interviews the researcher is also given the opportunity to explore answers, if there is a need for the interviewees to further clarify their responses, an important part when adopting a research philosophy of interpretivism (Hair et al., 2003, p. 135;

Saunders et al., 2012, p. 378). By letting the interviewees express themselves unreservedly our hope is to gain insightful and comprehensive data, allowing us to answer our research question. We believe that semi-structured interviews with both managers and customers are the best way to collect our qualitative data. This due to the ability of asking fairly the same questions to all interviewees so that we can, by analysing the results, distinguish possible patterns. At the same time the openness of the questions may also provide us with themes that we have not considered earlier and that may help us answer our research questions.

4.2.1 Interview Guide

An interview guide is often used as a research tool when carrying out semi-structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 384). It is to include the questions on specific topics relevant for researchers and hence represent what the researcher wishes to cover during the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467; Kvale, 2007, p. 56-57). An interview guide provides flexibility to the conduct of the interviews and it leaves the interviewee with a great deal of freedom in how to reply (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). An interview guide provides flexibility in the sense that the questions do not have to be asked in the exact way that they are outlined in the guide and the interviewer may ask questions that are not even included in the guide, so called follow up questions, wanting to elaborate on things being said by the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467; Kvale, 2007, p. 57). Based on our research question and the theoretical background of our thesis, we constructed our interview guides. As a first step in creating our interview guides we decided which themes that should be covered during the interviews. The themes chosen to be included in the interview guides were brand management, brand identity, brand image, brand love, brand commitment and brand loyalty. Based on these themes we decided on which questions to ask in relation to each theme and this resulted in two interview guides with approximately 20 questions in each. Apart from these, we began the interviews with four background questions. Formulating appropriate questions is crucial in semi-structured interviews in order to achieve success, and questions should be open-ended and researchers should avoid using leading or probing questions in order to control biases (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 291; 293). This was taken into consideration when constructing the interview guides. We used separate interview guides for the managers and the customers but they were both based on the themes mentioned above. We also strived towards asking fairly the same questions in order to be able to make a better analysis of the data collected.

The credibility may increase by providing the participants with the interview guide before hand, containing the themes being covered (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 385). It gives the interviewees the chance to prepare themselves and lets them know what you are interested in knowing and it may help to encourage the validity and reliability of the data being collected (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 473; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 385). We sent the interview guide to the company participants a couple of days before the interview took place. This enabled them to reflect upon the questions and prepare for the interview. We also brought an extra copy of the interview guide to the respondents if they wished to have it during the interview. For the customers, on the other hand, we did not provide them with the interview guide in advance. We felt that it was not necessary because we noticed that it stole focus from the interview and we wanted the customers to be able to speak freely. Our interview guides can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

4.2.2 Qualitative Sampling Technique and Access

It is important to have a strategy to gain access to the data that is needed for a study (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 427; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 216). To familiarise yourself with the target group or organization and to be well prepared is fundamental before attempting to gain physical access (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 217). It is also recommended to use existing contacts to gain access as well as to be prepared for that gaining access might be a long procedure that takes time (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 428; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 218-219).

In the qualitative research process sampling is an important step (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 241). There are a lot of different sampling schemes to choose from and all qualitative researchers should consider carefully which one they adopt (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 241). Sampling schemes can be divided into either random (probability) sampling schemes or non-random (non-probability) sampling schemes (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, pp. 241-242; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 262; 281). In interpretivist studies it is often so that the goal is to gain insights into a specific phenomenon, certain events or individuals and not to generalize the results to a population (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242). In such a case the participants are purposefully selected by the qualitative researcher in order to increase the understanding of the phenomena at hand (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242). Purposive sampling requires the researcher to use his or her own judgement to select interviewees that in the best way possible will help in answering the stated research question and to meet the objectives of the study (Guarte & Barrios, 2006, p. 277; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 287). In purposive sampling the participants are selected in a strategic way because of their relevance to obtain greater understanding of a social phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 442; Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Purposive sampling is very popular among researchers in the field of social science research (Guarte & Barrios, 2006, p. 277).

For our study we have decided to interview marketing managers of well-known Swedish clothing retailers as well as their customers. Our choice of companies can be considered purposive sampling since it is a non-probability sample, which we have based on specific criteria that we have had in mind. Even though we have not been able to fully rule over which company participants that has been secured, our own personal judgement has picked out the companies which we initiated contact with. When trying to gain access to clothing retailers we contacted 22 different companies. This includes the retailers that were found with the criteria in mind of having to be a company founded and located in Sweden. We also wanted the company headquarters to be close to Stockholm to facilitate our possibilities of conducting interviews in person. We reached out to the companies mainly with the use of telephones but the companies that we could not reach through phone were sent an email to. Out of the contacted companies we managed to secure four participants in our study, which was our aim from the beginning since we wanted to have the views of the different companies' customers as well. From the four companies the interviewees were: Karin Söderlind, CEO & Founder of Dagmar, Pernilla Johansson, Global PR Manager at Björn Borg, Peter Sjöström, Marketing Manager at Boomerang and Mikael Andersson, Sales & Marketing Manager at Fjällräven.

The sampling process of which customers we chose to interview can be considered to be purposive sampling as well since we have based the choices on our own personal

judgement. We based our sampling, our choice of customers, on judgement because we wanted to interview customers that had been with the company for at least a couple of years, and that we knew used their products regularly. We interviewed eight customers, wanting to secure at least two customers from each company and managed to do that apart from Dagmar where we only got contact with one. However, we do not see this as a limitation since the interview with Dagmar's customer was longer than the rest of the customer interviews and hence were able to provide us with quite extensive data. After these eight interviews we felt that data saturation was reached.

4.2.3 Face-to-face, Telephone & Email Interviews

Interviews may be conducted on a face-to-face basis, through telephone or by email (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 375). Interviews conducted on a one-to-one basis, between the researcher and the participants, are normally performed by meeting each other 'face to face' (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 375). Advantages with face-to-face interviews are that you are able to establish personal contact and that you have the opportunity to notice the non-verbal behaviours of the participants (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 405). Higher costs and limited access are however disadvantages with performing face-to-face interviews (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 404).

The approach of conducting telephone interviews may be seen as more convenient as it offers advantages such as faster speed of data collection and lower cost (Gillham, 2005, p. 5; Hair et al., 2003, p. 140; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 404). This method also allows researchers to make contact with participants with whom it would not be practical to conduct face-to-face interviews because of distance and time limits (Gillham, 2005, p. 5; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 404). There are, however, some disadvantages with collecting qualitative data through telephone interviews (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 404). The goal is to be able to explore the interviewees' responses when conducting semi-structured or in-depth interviews so it is of high importance to establish personal contact and this might be hard to do over the phone (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 404). Compared to a face-to-face interview the participant in a telephone interview may be less willing to offer you as much time to talk and be less willing to participate in an exploratory discussion (Saunders et al., 2012, pp. 404-405).

As with telephone interviews, Internet mediated interviews such as email interviews are a useful way to conduct interviews when the population a researcher wish to participate in their study are geographically dispersed (Hair et al., 2003, p. 141; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 405). It removes problems that might arise with audio recording and the time cost of transcribing since the data is automatically recorded as they are written in (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 405). However, a telephone interview compared to an email interview enable researchers to remain responsive instantly (Gillham, 2005, p. 102). With a telephone interview researchers are able to clarify possible misunderstandings, and from the tone of voice detect and identify signals, which is not achievable when conducting interviews through email (Gillham, 2005, p. 102).

Our aim was to be able to perform face-to-face interviews with all the company representatives because we viewed it beneficial for our study. However, due to work-related reasons Karin Söderlind at Dagmar and Mikael Andersson at Fjällräven were not able to meet with us in person. Instead of holding face-to-face interviews we conducted

a telephone interview with Mikael Andersson and an email interview with Karin Söderlind. We sent an email to Karin Söderlind with the same interview guide that we used with the other company representatives. We were also able to send follow up questions in additional emails if further explanation and deeper understanding was needed. We went on a field trip to Stockholm in the end of March in order to be able to hold face-to-face interviews with the rest of the company representatives.

4.2.4 Conducting the Interviews

Table 1 and 2 show an overview of the respondents for our interviews, both the company representatives and the customers.

TABLE 1. INTERVIEW OVERVIEW MANAGERS

Date	Company	Person	Position	Location	Time
March 26 th , 2015	Björn Borg	Pernilla Johansson	Global PR Manager	Tulegatan 11, Stockholm	30 min
March 27 th , 2015	Fjällräven	Mikael Andersson	Sales & Marketing Manager	Telephone Interview	29 min
March 27 th , 2015	Boomerang	Peter Sjöström	Marketing Manager	Kräftriket 16A, Stockholm	27 min
April 17 th , 2015	Dagmar	Karin Söderlind	CEO & Founder	Email Interview	

TABLE 2. INTERVIEW OVERVIEW CUSTOMERS

Date	Customer	Company	Location	Time
March 23 rd , 2015	1	Boomerang	Umeå University	14 min
April 14 th , 2015	2	Boomerang	Umeå University	11 min
April 20 th , 2015	3	Boomerang	Umeå University	14 min
March 23 rd , 2015	4	Björn Borg	Umeå University	19 min
March 23 rd , 2015	5	Björn Borg	Umeå University	15 min
March 23 rd , 2015	6	Fjällräven	Umeå University	19 min
March 24 th , 2015	7	Fjällräven	Umeå University	17 min
March 23 rd , 2015	8	Dagmar	Umeå University	34 min

When meeting the interviewee for the first time, it is important to establish yourself as a researcher by explaining your research (Ejvegård, 2003, p. 51; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 389). It is also important to gain the respondent's trust and confidence at the same time as establishing your credibility (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 389). We assured that the interviewees could be anonymous in our thesis if they so wished. An interview should begin with a shorter introduction of the study and the intention of performing the interviews (Kvale, 2007, p. 55). Therefore, we started our interviews by introducing our thesis and the purpose of the interview to make sure that the interviewee felt comfortable in answering our questions. We were both present during all the interviews because we felt that it was important for us to be able to discuss the responses afterwards and to assure ourselves that we had interpreted what had been said in a similar manner. We also deemed it appropriate to divide the questions between us in order for the interview to be conducted in an efficient manner. It was also beforehand decided that we would both actively participate during the interviews by asking follow-up questions whenever it was needed.

In terms of voice and wording, questions should be asked in a similar manner in order to avoid bias (Ejvegård, 2003, p. 52; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 389). This was applied during our interviews. In addition to this, another important part to consider when interviewing is not to use too many theoretical terms in the interview questions, since

the interviewees might not be as informed about the theoretical meaning of these terms as the interviewer is (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 390). Where we used certain terminology, specific for the phenomenon at hand, we ensured that the interviewee understood what was meant by it and explained it if needed.

The choice of location for our company interviews was the company headquarters. In order for it to be as convenient as possible for the participants and for it to be in an environment where they felt comfortable this choice was made (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 386). We saw this as important since we have to bear in mind that they are giving up valuable working time to participate in this thesis. For the customer interviews we had a room booked at the university in order to be able to avoid any disturbances that may occur. It is also important that the setting where the interview takes place is quiet in order for the recordings not to contain any sound disturbances that might affect the quality of the recordings (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 476; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 386).

It was also important for us to hold the interviews in the mother tongue of the respondents, so therefore we held all our interviews in Swedish. We felt that it was important for the respondents to be able to express his or her thoughts freely without worrying about trying to find the right words or expressions. Patel & Davidsson (2011, p. 82) explain that to ease the conversation it is beneficial if the interviewer use the same wording and gesturing as the interviewee. We felt that it might hinder the respondents if we asked the questions in English so therefore we chose to do it in Swedish, a language in which they are comfortable speaking. However, the process of translating the questions and answers into another language, in this case English, may raise potential problems when the material later on is being analysed (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 488; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 442). Nevertheless, we felt that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages with holding the interviews in Swedish and in order to avoid problems when translating, we always collaborated.

It should also be acknowledged that the length of the interviews conducted, both with the company representatives and the customers, were shorter in time than what could be desirable for this study. We recognize this as a limitation to our study and it should also be considered when reading the results. Evidently, the length of interviews had its effect on the amount of data that we were able to gather.

4.2.5 Transcribing

The following step after conducting interviews is to prepare the data collected for analysis. This is done by transcribing the qualitative data, i.e. writing down what is said during the interviews word by word (Saunders et. al., 2012, p. 550). It is not only what is being said that is interesting for analysis, but also to note how the words are being said (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 482). Interaction factors such as intonation and pauses can be of great importance for analysis (Kvale, 2007, p. 97). To be able to transcribe the interviews in this manner, we needed to audio-record them. Before each interview started we made sure that the respondent felt comfortable being recorded while being interviewed and consequently gave us his or her permission of recording the interview. One downside of audio recording can be the vulnerability of non-working technique, leading to the risk of losing the data collected (Saunders et. al., 2012, p. 396). In order to reduce this risk, we recorded from two different set of audio recording devices. In this way, we would still have one recorded version of the interview even if technical

issues would occur with the first device. Another disadvantage of transcribing qualitative data is that it is a very time-consuming process (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 483). We saw this as an inevitable issue and dealt with it by transcribing the interviews as soon as we could after their completion. Recording and transcribing the interviews still have strong advantages such as that it allows for careful examination of what is being said during the interviews and decreases the risk of researchers forgetting important data from the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 481). We value these advantages of recording and transcribing interviews highly and therefore we were willing to cope with the disadvantages as well.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis

When conducting qualitative research it will generate large amount of data and this can in turn pose difficulties when starting the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 571). Large amount of data will most likely contain rich and useful information but it may be difficult to find these pieces of valuable information due to the size of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 571). Further on, it is important to be very careful when examining qualitative data since words may be interpreted in different ways depending on who are interpreting them (Saunders et. al., 2012, p. 546). This in turn leads to qualitative data being more likely to be ambiguous to interpret than quantitative data (Saunders et. al., 2012, p. 546). Also, qualitative data analysis has not reached the same level of standard analytical procedures that quantitative data analysis have, making it even harder to analyse qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 571).

Despite these strains of analysing qualitative data there are some strategies to apply. One approach commonly used towards analysing qualitative data is referred to as thematic analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 571). Thematic analysis is a method used to find and analyse themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Some researchers also refer to these themes as codes (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 572). These codes can also be described as categorization of interview statements (Kvale, 2007, p. 99). Braun & Clarke (2006) described advantages as well as disadvantages of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible method to use in the sense that it can be applicable to many different types of studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). It is further a quite easy to use method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96). Despite of these advantages there are also disadvantages such as that there is a risk that no analysis of the data will be made (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94). There is further the risk of the analysis not being strong enough and considered as weak (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94). However, Braun & Clarke (2006, pp. 96-97) further argued that the disadvantages of the thematic analysis is not due to the method itself, but rather due to researchers' inability of carrying out a well-done analysis. Nevertheless, we believe that the advantages of a thematic analysis outweigh the disadvantages and we therefore believe that thematic analysis is an appropriate analysis approach in this thesis. One technique of thematic analysis is called thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 385). Thematic network analysis aims at structuring and mapping the salient themes that are discovered through thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). In this sense, a thematic network shows the core features of a text (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 386).

How the analysis of data is carried out differs depending on whether research commences from an inductive or deductive research approach (Saunders et. al., 2012, p.

544). Analysing data using a deductive approach implies that existing theories are being thought of and are affecting the manner in which researchers are approaching their research data (Saunders et. al., 2012, p. 548). On the other hand, if research commences from an inductive approach it indicates that theory should emerge from the research data when it is being analysed (Saunders et. al., 2012, p. 548). As mentioned earlier, an inductive approach is used in this thesis. Using an inductive approach within thematic analysis indicates that the analysis is data-driven and the coding of the data has not been made in order to match a certain coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

We have decided to carry out a thematic network analysis using an inductive approach. The thematic network analysis depicts the salient themes of a text on three levels (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388). These levels are basic themes, organizing themes and global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388). Basic themes are themes that are least prominent in the text, and a basic theme is hard to understand if it is not put into context of the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001, pp. 388-389). A basic theme drawn from context says very little about the text at large (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). The organizing themes group the basic themes together into clusters that are similar to each other (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). These clusters of basic themes, so called organizing themes, better conveys what the text concerns (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Lastly, the third and most prominent level of themes is the global theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). The global theme groups the organizing themes together in order to create a summary of the main themes and the text as a whole (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Each thematic network has one global theme at its core (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Consequently, more complex data that results in several thematic networks will also have several global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). We considered this technique to be a beneficial tool for us to use when analysing the data. Due to the amount of qualitative data that we have collected, a systematic approach was needed in order to find the significant parts of data. We found that the thematic network analysis fulfilled this purpose and helped us create three thematic networks with three different global themes. These global themes were Brand Experience, Brand Connection and Brand Development. These thematic networks can be found in Appendix 3.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical conduct is strongly associated with the integrity of research and therefore it is essential to acknowledge the impact of ethical behaviour when conducting research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 122). Therefore, we have carefully considered the ethical aspects of our research in order to increase the integrity and reliability of this thesis.

One important aspect of conducting research ethically concerns the potential harm to participants (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 128). Such potential harm can range from psychological harm to physical harm (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 128-129; Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 45). This area of ethical conduct has been given much thought in this thesis when approaching and conducting interviews with the managers from the clothing companies. In order not to deceive anyone we have been honest about the future accessibility of this thesis. We felt this was necessary in order to stress the fact that this will be a public document in case such knowledge would change their interest of being part of this thesis.

An area in research ethics that should be acknowledged is the issue of informed consent. Informed consent refers to informing the participants as much as possible about the study beforehand to allow the participants to make an informed decision on whether or not they want to take part in the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 133). Another aspect of informed consent is that the participants are participating voluntarily (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70). We have been open about what type of thesis this is and have beforehand told the participants in what area of research we have chosen to conduct research when asking if they would be interested in participating. We were unable to give specific information about the research direction upon first contact due to the fact that the research direction has been a changing process during the first months of the thesis progress. To compensate for this we made sure that the company representatives had access to the interview guide before the interview, giving them the opportunity to feel informed about what the interview would contain. An issue in qualitative research related to this ethical area of informed consent is the level of information the researchers should give to the participants in regards of the purpose of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 71). Researchers need to determine what information is essential for the participants to have and what information may be too detailed for them (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 71). Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 133) also point at informing and gaining the permission about using recording equipment during an interview is another way of informed consent. We were very careful to follow this ethical conduct and started each interview with asking permission to record the interview.

Continuing on the issue of informed consent, another part of informed consent refers to the confidentiality of the study being conducted (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 71). This confidential aspect includes the importance of informing the participants of the future accessibility of the study and that it is to be published (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 71). Considering the public access of this thesis upon its completion, we were careful about informing the participants of this future accessibility and informed them that there was a possibility of participating anonymously if they would prefer to do so. Also, when conducting the interviews we asked if they felt comfortable with their own name and the company name being displayed in our thesis. Sometimes it gives further validity to the research at hand if the name and position of the participants are displayed and in those cases it is essential to ask permission of the participants (Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 46). We felt that getting their consent was of great importance in order not to cause harm to these participants and to respect their integrity.

Further areas of ethical conduct are the issues of deception and invasion of privacy (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 136). Of course, our aim is not to deceive anyone and by being open about what the study concerns we believe that the participants have felt well informed. We further believe that their privacy has been protected in the sense that they have been given the opportunity of participating anonymously and the interview guide have not contained particular delicate questions that could lead to privacy hurting answers.

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this chapter we will present our findings from the data collection. We will examine the findings in relation to brand management, brand identity, brand image, brand love, brand loyalty and brand commitment. Under each of the concepts, where it is applicable, we will start with the findings from the company representatives and then address the findings from the customers. This chapter will serve as a base for our thematic network analysis presented in the analysis chapter.

5.1 Brand Management

The findings of our study demonstrate how brands were managed within the different clothing companies that we reached out to and how they viewed brands as strategic assets. From the interviews it was a common notion that the target group for these brands had or was going through changes. Peter Sjöström (personal communication, March 27, 2015) from Boomerang, for instance stated *“We have rejuvenated the target group to some extent and are in the process where we want to rejuvenate the brand slightly and gain more younger customers to the brand”*. Karin Söderlind (personal communication, April 17, 2015) at Dagmar expressed their changed target group as *“Very little, but it changes a bit from a more mature target group towards a more fashion conscious target group”*.

What was also highlighted in some of the interviews was that it is rather about targeting customers with a certain lifestyle than a specific age range. Mikael Andersson (personal communication, March 27, 2015) at Fjällräven explained that their most regular customers are not within a particular age range but rather that they possess a certain lifestyle and enjoy the outdoors. This lifestyle approach is also brought up by Pernilla Johansson (personal communication, March 26, 2015), who described the target group of Björn Borg as quite broad when it comes to age, but quite specific when it comes to their attitudes towards life. She stated *“We do not put a specific age limit on our target group, but it is rather an attitude towards life. Our target group consists of urban, fashion-conscious people who think that being active and making a difference is far more attractive than playing it safe. These people tend to range between 20-40 years of age, but there are certainly exceptions! Our brand takes an active stance for more love in the world. We target people who can identify themselves with the brand’s DNA”* (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). The term lifestyle was also emphasized by Sjöström at Boomerang, but in a somewhat different form. He highlighted the lifestyle in relation to the current position that the Boomerang brand has taken on the market, the position of a Scandinavian lifestyle brand (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

5.2 Brand Identity

We have chosen to investigate the brand identity of the chosen clothing companies. Our aim was to be able to compare company representatives’ given perceptions of their brand identity to the brand image as perceived by the interviewed customers in order to find eventual congruence. Therefore, we asked the company representatives what type

of brand they represented and how the brand was intended to be perceived amongst their customers. Since the brands are distinct from each other in terms of offering different clothing products, there were different explanations given in regards to their brand identities.

As a first step in investigating the brands' identities we wanted to know the brands' characteristics. Johansson described the characteristics of the Björn Borg brand as *"Just like our products, our brand identity is also very active in many ways and being Swedish, we honour our Swedish heritage by taking an active stand for love and for equality on all levels. We believe in and take a stand for everyone's equal rights. This is the foundation of our brand DNA. Our product promise to create sports fashion for people who want to look and feel active and attractive."* (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). She also stated that this is what differentiates Björn Borg from other sports brands on the market (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). When asking Andersson about the characteristics of Fjällräven, words such as function, quality, environment and design were all mentioned and he also felt that these characteristics brought value to the brand. These characteristics are also something visible in the personality of the brand (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). *"Timeless and like I said the quality, you should know that when you buy a product from us you should feel confident with it in all aspects, everything from it being produced in such an environmentally friendly way that is possible today, to the product meeting the requirements you have on it"* (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). When asked to describe the personality of the Fjällräven brand by only using three words, Andersson used the words timeless, design and function.

When asked to describe the characteristics of Boomerang, Sjöström (personal communication, March 27, 2015) stated, *"We try to utilize the Scandinavian environment and the lifestyle here much more in our communication, as a base in everything we do and that differentiates us and is the most evident characteristic of Boomerang"*. Scandinavian is one of the words that Sjöström used when describing the personality of the Boomerang brand, together with the words quality and sustainability. Sustainability is an important core value of the Boomerang brand (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Boomerang works with the so-called "Boomerang Effekten", a sustainability concept where they accept old garments and offer a customer discount on a new garment (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

Touching the subject of Dagmar's brand personality the words intellectual, sensual and rebel are used (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). *"There should be a balance in how she is perceived, intellectual and sensual shall always be together and you should never just perceive one of them without the other, the whole idea with Dagmar is rather the feeling of both"* (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). The characteristics of the Dagmar brand is said to be *"personal, high quality and good level of fashion"* (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

Andersson emphasized that it is crucial for a company to have its own history and identity and that it is important not to forget this. Andersson explained that it is the history with which their customers identify themselves. *"People who say and write that they have grown up with kånken, or my mother, father, grandfather or grandmother had that jacket or whatever it can be and then you, they have spoken well about, about the*

brand and then it actually becomes the second, third or fourth generation. And that is what the greater strength is, that we do not make up, we are not a made-up brand, we are a brand that actually have a real story” (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Andersson entailed that they have a certain mind-set at the company, created by the founder of Fjällräven. “As a company we are a bit special and what we are grown up with, or taught I should say, by the founder is that, his ideology was that if everyone else turns left, we turn right. Not always of course, but very often and also to dare to challenge yourself and dare to make mistakes as well. Have the courage to take special drastic methods, that at first sight might sound very odd” (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

Whether or not these clothing companies wanted their customers to use their products in order to fulfil their current view of themselves or their ideal view of themselves was interesting to see. For the majority of the company representatives this was hard to answer and believed to be much individual. However, Söderlind said that they wanted their customer to use clothes from Dagmar in order to reach their ideal self.

When asked about the values working as cornerstones for further development of the brand, Johansson described a culture that impregnates the complete organization. *“Every single person in the company is working towards the same goal. We have all taken part in developing a business plan that sets our goals until 2019 and together we are working to reach these goals. It brings us together and creates a competitive but at the same time friendly atmosphere. We are a very active company and it is reflected in everything we do, from working on business plans to the obligatory sports hour on Fridays” (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). This impregnating culture was also mentioned by Andersson, when talking about values that work as a foundation for the continuous development of the brand. He stated “Values are really, we of course return to the things I mentioned earlier, with quality, and an environmental mind-set, in all kinds of ways and that it is supposed to impregnate everything in a company, everything from how you view your personnel to how you handle the production industry” (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Sjöström explained that Boomerang is working with vitalising and energizing the brand, however, this is not as evident for the customer as it is for Boomerang. “And where we are now and working with the next spring/summer -16 collection we are somewhere, if you imagine a long train, then we are in the front of the train and we can see the next corner but of course our customers are much more in the end of the train and cannot see everything that is happening right now. So there are a certain discrepancy in the development of the brand where we would like to feel that we are further ahead than what is visible for the customer today” (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Söderlind also mentioned this discrepancy and said that their brand image only partly coincides with their customers’ image of the brand. “I mean that you are always a step ahead in your thoughts than the customer and that it always takes time for the customer to keep up with the development of the brand” (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015).*

When approaching the subject of getting the customers closer to the brand, Sjöström entailed that Boomerang is more interested in having a relation with their customers rather than a transaction amongst them. *“It is about developing the product, maintaining quality. It is about service in the store and somewhere we are striving towards a relationship rather than a transaction. That we want the customers to be our friends,*

sort of...well, that the customer should feel active, conscious, think quality, feel a safety and pride in wearing Boomerang" (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Relations are also something brought up by Sjöström when asked about the personality of the brand. He said that it should be like an old friend that you could trust and have confidence in (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). On the question of what the company is trying to do to get their customers to identify themselves with the brand Söderlind emphasized the personality of the brand. *"We try to create a personality in the brand through everything that we do. We do things our way, we are not followers, rather more personal"* (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

Upon questions regarding brand symbolization and what message to send out to the customers different feelings were described. Johansson explained the message the Björn Borg brand wants to communicate by the usage of their products as *"that we have products that feels attractive and in that way they feel fashionable and that you feel attractive in them and that you feel strong and magnificent in them in some way. That they strengthen you and that they maintain best quality"* (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Andersson (personal communication, March 27, 2015) explained that the Fjällräven brand symbolizes quality and stated *"so you constantly return to the notion of lasting quality and that you are safe, you should feel safe when purchasing the product from us, you should not have to doubt that, the follow up question 'will it last' is what we want to get away from"*. Re-occurring during the interview with Sjöström was the "Boomerang Effekten" which he also said was closely connected to what Boomerang symbolizes. He said that this way of thinking can be seen throughout the company from production to delivery in the sense that what you present to your customers is also something that you risk getting back if you have done a poor job (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

5.3 Brand Image

The findings demonstrated how some customers of the chosen brands perceived the brand and how they felt they could identify themselves with the brand. When asked whether or not the customers identified themselves with others who use the brand we received different answers. For the majority of the interviewees it was difficult to give a straightforward answer to the question but in the end the answers still became no. One of the interviewees stated *"there is a wide span of consumers using Björn Borg so I do not think you really can say yes or no. So I would, if I was to use yes or no, then I would say no, just because there are so many different types of consumers. It is scattered between ages and different tastes in clothing. So I would say no"* (4). It was only one interviewee that stated that he identified himself with others using the brand, saying that: *"I do not know exactly who the typical Boomerang users are but it kind of is, well a relatively fashion conscious person that, and I guess that is me"* (1). However, the majority of the interviewed customers felt as if people in their surroundings who are similar to themselves, commonly use the brand. Customers of the Björn Borg brand stated, *"Pretty much I think, pretty large. I categorize myself maybe a bit more like the sporty guy and I believe that you see a lot of those wearing Björn Borg"* (5). *"Well, it is mostly younger men, I would like to say. So in that sense it resembles me"* (4). The customer of Dagmar also believed that the brand is used by people who are similar to herself (8). However, she argued for Dagmar being a brand that attracts a somewhat

older audience, both in terms of the higher level of prices as well as that she thinks that as you get older you may value high quality more so than younger customers do (8).

For the same reason as we asked the company representatives if their brand were to be used to fulfil the customers' current views of themselves or their ideal views of themselves, we asked the interviewed customers to what self-fulfilling extent they used the specific brands. Only one of them said that using the brand fulfilled his current view of himself (1), one expressed her usage of the brand as fulfilling a bit of both her current and ideal view of herself and she mentioned that the feeling of pride is associated with wearing the brand (8), while the rest of the interviewed customers all felt the brands were used in fulfilling their ideal views of themselves. *"Oh, that was a good question. I guess it is more of the ideal picture. I associate Björn Borg with sporty and so, maybe you want to be that type of guy, I do not know. But it may be something there"* (5). One of the customers of Fjällräven stated *"I think I believe I am more of a Fjällräven person than I actually are, it is a bit more about fulfilling the ideal self in that case"* (6). It was noticed from the interviews that the typical customer of Fjällräven, their target group, is a desirable state of self. The other customer of Fjällräven said *"I want to think that I am active, a bit of an outdoors person, and I also enjoy being out and walking in the forest and mountains and things like that and go hiking so I would probably say that the profile of the brand suits me quite well...an ideal view of myself that, not always is correct perhaps"* (7).

In order to properly compare the brand identity with the brand image of the brands within this thesis, it was of importance to also investigate how the customers viewed the brand's personality and their belief of what were the characteristics of the brand. These findings were of course rather individual, based on the specific brand. When asked to describe the personality of Fjällräven one of the customers said, *"I mean when I think about Fjällräven, I think about my father, and my father is sort of a forester and out in the forests a lot but, an outdoors person, active! Active! There we have it, active!"* (6). Other words mentioned to describe the Fjällräven brand were words such as quality, comfortable, modern touch, and a bit of drive and ambition (6; 7). Some of these words were also mentioned when asked what the brand's name and logo stands for and what it symbolizes to the customers along with words such as forestry, outdoors and sustainability (6; 7). When asked to describe the Boomerang brand's personality one customer said, *"Well I would say kind of fashion conscious and focused towards youths and then I would say that it is not loud clothing. They do not advertise as much as a lot of other brands that this is a Boomerang sweater, this is a pair of Boomerang pants. It is a pretty discreet brand"* (1). Another description of the Boomerang brand was *"A proper brand, for older men, with a subtle tone in everything, nothing extravagant but rather classic men's fashion"* (2). When further talking about the characteristics of the Boomerang brand, a couple of similar opinions were expressed. *"Well they have good looking clothes and good quality as well as, well stylish perhaps"* (1). *"Well my experience is that it is clothes with good quality. More than what, now I do not remember what I paid last time, but I would like to say that it is more than medium-price on a garment and I believe that you receive better quality as well"* (2). One of the customers described the symbolization of the Boomerang brand's name and logo as: *"Well, it is a boomerang so I guess it means that you will return. It is good stuff, you go in and then you come back. It does not symbolise anything in particular to me really, it is just everyday clothes"* (1).

Both of the Björn Borg customers interviewed described Björn Borg as being innovative among other things. *“Well, characteristics, it is, they are very talented in renewing themselves...They always have like, they always manage to come with new designs, where I can see that this is a completely new design and I want it. And that is pretty unique (4). “They stand out from their competitors, that they are innovative and fresh. It fits their target group very well I would imagine. Which I am then included in. I think they are very skilled more towards the sporty direction” (5).* When asked to describe the personality of the Björn Borg brand only using three words, one of the interviewed customers stated *“I would say these two that I have mentioned before, comfort, design and then I would like to say, I would say confidence as a third...It is a bit like that with everything. If you build a house, the first beam needs to work, likewise in the morning when you choose your clothes. I do not like to wear underwear that I do not feel comfortable with, then I do not feel comfortable in the rest of the outfit, I mean it really does matter. I almost feel that it is worse to wear ugly underwear than ugly pants. Even if no one else sees it, because it is just the feeling that it brings (4).* The customer of Dagmar described the brand as being elegant, unique and detailed (8). *“We have talked about it a bit, but I would describe them as having an innovative mind-set, as I said both sort of elegant and talented at nice silhouettes, incredibly talented...it is very well thought through and detailed”(8).* The main characteristics of the Dagmar brand and what adds value to the brand was said to be its details, the usefulness, and the thorough creation of the garments (8). The customer further explained that the brand’s name and logo symbolizes timeless fashion and a sense of belongingness (8).

We were interested in investigating whether or not a constant relation between customer and brand would increase the understanding of the brand. None of the interviewed customers of Boomerang and Björn Borg expressed that they felt as if a constant relation with the brand would help them gain a deeper understanding of the brand itself. However, both the customers of Fjällräven and Dagmar felt as if a constant relation with the brand would help them understand what comprises the brand. One customer at Fjällräven expressed it as *“Yes, probably quite a lot I would say, because each garment that you buy from Fjällräven has a certain history, they do build up a background to a certain garment, I mean they name it after a certain region or something that helps you understand more and more what it is all about the more you get involved with Fjällräven” (7).*

5.4 Brand Love

The relevance of brand love, both among the company representatives as well as how it was experienced among the customers, was shown in our findings. When discussing the subject of brand love, Sjöström explained it as a total experience, beginning with the store environment and ending with how the customer experiences the product when using it. He also stated, *“I believe that it is hard to express only one factor here but I believe that if we do not deliver quality in our garments, if we miss this part I believe that we will rather fast lose this affection” (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015).* Andersson from Fjällräven expressed a similar opinion regarding what is needed to increase love and devotion to their products in the sense that there are plenty of activities needed. *“Well there is not only one thing, it is so incredibly many things one need to do there, everything from the right kind of marketing, the right channels, the right event, the right products, the right distributors, the right brand*

building people around the country and, on the right places online, it is quite a lot of things that you need to do there (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). The meaning of love is acknowledged in Boomerang's branding strategy, in terms of wanting to have a long-term relationship with their customers (Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Sjöström (personal communication, March 27) said *"Once again, that these garments in the wardrobe shall be favourites, is to me also an attitude that we wish to accomplish, a love for the brand"*.

The feelings that the Dagmar products should give the customers are a sense of security and credibility (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). *"Security in the sense that the brand stands for a high level of fashion and high level of quality...Credibility in the sense that the brand image and how you perceive it and the feeling the brand provides, which you either take into consideration or not depending on whether it coincides with your own values or not"* (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). Credibility is also seen as an important part in what is considered necessary in order for customers to develop devotion and love towards a brand (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). The notion of brand love as a strategic tool in their marketing is however not something that they have adopted (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

The empathic part of the brand is what will make the customer develop a feeling of devotion according to Johansson at Björn Borg. Regarding whether or not brand love is considered in their marketing strategy, she said *"It is not a term that we have been working with, but of course we are working constantly with the connection to our brand and how we are perceived as a brand and if you with brand love mean a type of devotion to the brand then we hope to accomplish that of course with the way we profile the brand. And that is what we believe in. It is not just something we have adopted because it feels and sounds good, it is really something, it truly stems from the heart and is what we stand for. And we also hope that it will be felt as well, that the consumers feel it"* (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015).

Different feelings were expressed among the customers in regards to the respective brands. Half of the interviewed customers would express their feelings as love towards the brand that they were interviewed in regards to (4; 5; 6; 8) and the other half would not describe their feelings for the brand as love (1; 2; 3; 7). Even though one of the customers did not feel love towards the brand in question he explained that he is very satisfied with the brand (1). He stated *"You always have these brands where, these kind of garments always fits, no matter if it is a shirt or a sweater that you are buying. And Boomerang is one of those brands for me and in that way I believe that it is very good since I get what I expect from this brand. And I am always satisfied with it so I could say satisfaction maybe. I guess that is the largest feeling for this brand"* (1). Another customer, who as well would not describe the feelings as love, but nevertheless described the feelings for the brand in a much positive manner, was one of the customers for the Fjällräven brand who said *"Well I would probably say that I feel pretty strongly for the Fjällräven brand, that kind of positive, strong feeling because, it is something that you have used for a very long time and you know that it is great quality, it works so therefore I only have positive feelings. I would gladly go and buy more clothes from Fjällräven. So this sort of feeling, relation is what I have with Fjällräven"* (7). One of Björn Borg's customers that explained his feelings as love stated *"Well, they are very warm...Björn Borg are the only underwear that I buy and*

the only piece of clothing that I allow my parents to buy. So that it becomes, well I am, it is the only thing, so to say, and every Christmas and every birthday I get Björn Borg underwear. Since I know that no matter what they buy I will be satisfied with them. And they will always have a good fit and I know what I get...Well, they are warm, a feeling of safety” (4). One of the Fjällräven customers gave a straightforward answer whether or not she felt love for the brand: “Yes, I would say so” (6). The customer of Dagmar described her feelings towards the brand in a positive manner, she was however careful about using the word love in relation to the brand and stated “I mean, for me, love is a very strong word and I do not know if love, but well sure, I guess there is some kind of love there, sure, I mean it is not like, I do really like the brand” (8).

The explanation to what would make the customers who did not experience brand love develop the feeling of love towards the brand was shown in the findings. One of the customers of Boomerang who did not express love for the brand said *“Well, most of the time it is that, for me it is that you get high quality. For what you buy, and I do think that Boomerang is quite expensive and that could be the reasons as to why you do not buy it as often considering the situation of being a student. And I feel as if it is perhaps not this outstanding quality that you may want but still great quality” (2). To further explore the emotional attachment the customers might have towards their brand we wanted to know how they would feel if the brand suddenly was not available on the market any longer. All of those customers who expressed their feelings toward the brand as love also expressed a deep concern if the brand would no longer be available. One of the Björn Borg customers expressed his concerns as, “I would most definitely do so. I actually keep track of the stock market and I know that it has gone a bit poorly for the brand, at least on their Asian expansion and such. So then I get a bit concerned when I imagine that they might stop selling. So it is those things I think about when I at large think about how the company is doing. I want them to still be around. It would feel really inconvenient to switch brand” (4). One of Fjällräven’s customer said, “Yes I would miss it. As I said, right now I do not have that much products from Fjällräven but it still, it serves its purpose in terms of an outdoors jacket or, if I had to choose between Haglöfs and Fjällräven then I would buy Fjällräven” (6). One customer from Boomerang would miss the brand if it would no longer be available, however he referred to it as a temporary loss (1). “It would be more of a temporary loss until I would find another brand with those type of clothes that...Shirts from Boomerang fits me perfectly so if I would find another brand with the same fit, then I would not find it problematic to switch, but before that I would probably miss Boomerang somewhat” (1). Some of the customers who did not feel love towards the brand did not express this concern and thought that it would be replaceable (2; 3; 7).*

5.5 Brand Loyalty

There were different findings on how loyalty is considered by the customer representatives. Sjöström from Boomerang discussed their aim of creating a relationship with their customer rather than a monetary transaction. He explained it as, *“It has to be deeper than that. In Sweden we are in general rather far ahead concerning loyalty programs, but it is very much about monetary levels, to be intrigued with discounts. And that does not result in deep loyalty because if someone gives you a better offer you go there instead. So it does not result in true loyalty. So it is about delivering the complete experience of the brand. The service, the product, the recognition of the brand through*

communication and so forth. Utilise the loyalty program to individually adopt and personalise the communication. That is where I believe that we can reach deeper loyalty” (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Another view was presented by Johansson from Björn Borg, who said, “it is if you in your heart feel that you can identify with the brand. It is first then that you can become loyal...you cannot become loyal if the products do not deliver on what they say they will. So it is a combination of them both, I would say” (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Söderlind from Dagmar described loyal customers as those who repurchase the brand, speaks well about the brand and are proud to wear the brand.

The findings demonstrate the issue of increasing habitual loyalty and what reasons for repurchases that may be relevant. One of the major factors in why customers return to the Boomerang brand was by Sjöström believed to be the safety factor. He stated, *“I believe that it is the whole experience and in many cases I believe it is much about safety. You know what you get and you have been a customer for a long time. You recognize some of the fit of the garments, the quality. You know that it works, it is good, you feel comfortable in it” (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Loyalty was seen as the reason why Björn Borg’s customers are re-occurring (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). “It is because of the loyalty. It all goes hand in hand, because you can never win someone over by faking your products. Everything needs to be real otherwise it will not work. You return because you are satisfied, that is just the way it is” (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Söderlind from Dagmar believed that the reason for their customers returning to the brand is because they are able to meet the customer expectations. However, she did not describe any particular actions they take in order to create habitual loyalty (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). “It is something that have to come natural in all that we do, we do not work with single projects with the purpose of gaining loyalty, it is rather that we put effort and love in what we do and hope that it will shine through all the way to the customer. Everyone who works with us are very devoted to what they do and love their work and take their work very seriously. It hopefully shines through” (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). Regarding brand loyalty and the ability to create habitual loyalty Sjöström (personal communication, March 27, 2015) stated “I would say partly that it is much about service and customer treatment. I would say that it is one key to develop deep loyalty. It is about delivering products of course, both in terms of quality, expression, and feeling, that you enjoy the product. If we would lose that it would all fall apart”.*

A general perspective to consider in the clothing retail industry in order to retain customers was shown in the findings. Andersson stressed the importance of considering the totality for the companies. *“I believe it is tremendously important to see the big picture in a company, it is really my answer in all of this, it is the totality. It is so easy to exchange one thing and think ‘now we are going to be good at environment’ and then you instead forget the quality and so forth, I mean the totality is a winning concept and it costs for a company to think like that...It is the big picture! That is the answer from my side, I know, I have been active for quite a long time in this business and have also paid attention to the fashion industry and certain, brands and there I feel that it is a lot of brands that gets a bit side-tracked and if there are ten things that you should consider, if you complete eight of them then you are satisfied. That is not how we do it, we complete all ten of them. And as I said, of course that will cost to do so, but, we do not see it like that. We see it as a long-term thinking” (M. Andersson, personal*

communication, March 27, 2015). Johansson mentioned that it is important not to be generic in your marketing and has given this considerable thought when marketing their products. *“Our ads are never, we never have ads that are not connected with everything else. If we have ads or billboards they always belong to a larger campaign where we try to accentuate a message that feels important to us. So we never do these generic ads but that is something, that is what we believe in. To dare to stand out and differentiate yourself in some way, is what I believe are means to success within the fashion industry”* (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015).

Whether or not the customers defined themselves as being loyal to the brand was demonstrated in the results. The majority of the interviewed customers would define themselves as experiencing brand loyalty. Both customers at Björn Borg considered themselves as being loyal toward the brand and they both referred to it as involving purchase behaviour (4; 5). *“Well yes, I do think so, since I have purchased it for so many years. So I consider myself as being rather loyal. I choose their brand before other brands, so a bit loyal I would say”* (5). *“Well, I am loyal in the sense that it is in general the only underwear brand that I purchase. So I would say that I am loyal. But as I said, it becomes so special with underwear as well. It becomes a completely different thing than with jeans. I would never be loyal to a jeans brand, I will rather buy what fits me well”* (4). One customer of Fjällräven explained her loyalty towards the brand as *“As mentioned before, I like the brand and that is also why I would choose Fjällräven, say I would buy a backpack, I bought mine from Fjällräven but I could have just as easily bought one from Haglöfs...but I suppose I just have a good association with the brand...but I think that my parents have affected me somewhat as well because as soon as I go back home and I need something my dad always say we should go to Fjällräven. So I guess it is somewhat connected to that as well, that since I was a child and my dad has always had those kind of clothes so that have had an impact as well”* (6). The customer at Dagmar argued that the loyalty for the brand increases when you get an understanding of what the brand is about (8). She also explained that what helps to increase her loyalty to the brand is an understanding of the history of the brand in order to understand what it stands for (8).

One of Boomerang’s customers explained that the reason for returning to the brand after purchasing other brands was due to feeling satisfied with the products (1). The discussion continued and approached the issue of how the customers’ loyalty could be increased. Both customers from the Boomerang brand and the Björn Borg brand talked about the issue of availability (1; 3; 4). *“Well, larger, they do not have such large assortment or not so large, not so many stores actually, so somewhat more available”* (3). *“It is quite difficult to achieve somewhat of an integration with the Björn Borg brand since they have few of their own shops. Especially here in the north, there is probably one in Stockholm but. Well, I do not know. Continue producing great things and I will be more than pleased”* (4).

In addition to investigating the level of loyalty, the type of feelings that were associated with the customers’ loyalty was also found. We asked the customers what feelings they would experience if they were faced with a purchase situation where they normally would have purchased the chosen brand, but for some reason this brand were not available on the event of the purchase. The majority of the customers described distressed feelings associated with not being able to buy the specific brand when being in such a purchase situation. One of Björn Borg’s customers expressed his feelings as,

“It would be really hard actually. Simply because it is very comfortable to know that you always have something to return to and to, that is also a pretty, if you buy these expensive underwear, they are quite expensive as well, so I mean, it is not like I want, I would think that it would be hard having to try on a bunch of new brands because it is a pretty large, well they cost around 200 SEK for a pair and then to, to take a chance on that and not knowing what you will get just feels as a feeling of insecurity. But then I also know that if I pay 200 SEK for a pair of underwear simply because I know exactly what I will get, I do not get any, there are no risks, no thrills, nothing. I get exactly what I want and then I am prepared to pay for it. I would not be prepared to pay for a brand where I do not know what I will get in return. So if it was not available it would be a discomforting feeling actually” (4). If the Fjällräven brand would not be available, one of the customers imagined that she would feel distressed, irritated and disappointed (6). The other customer of the Fjällräven brand explained that he would also feel a kind of distressed feeling but mainly due to the hassle of having to explore other options (7). If Dagmar as a brand would not be available there was a belief that it would not be possible to fully replace it with another brand and the customer also stated that it is one of her favourite brands (8). *“I believe that it would not be anything that could replace this, their unique part, that it feels so well produced, well designed, well-stitched and well thought through. Then, of course, you can find this elegance that they have in other brands as well but that will be in a different way and this is somehow why they have managed to perform so well also, that they are unique, that they are going their own way” (8).*

In a more general perspective, there were different factors that the interviewed customers viewed as important in order to retain customers within the clothing industry. Both customers at Björn Borg emphasized having an innovative mind-set as well as staying true to the character of the brand. *“You constantly need to reinvent yourself but at the same time you cannot lose your concept...Björn Borg for example, they constantly need to bring some new designs that attract me but at the same time I always have to feel that it is a Björn Borg...It is a balance between rejuvenating yourself and renewing yourself but still not change the core” (4).* *“It is probably important to partly be innovative and then it is important to stick with your niche or how to say. I think that is very important, I mean clothing brands have their own little direction and I believe that it is important to follow that direction. Follow in line with it but to stay innovative and to stay in fashion” (5).* The Dagmar customer also believed that it is really important, in a general sense, to remember the core of the brand and that there must be a unity throughout the whole brand, a completeness in a sense (8). To be seen and present was also considered to be important as well as to make continuous updates (3; 1)

5.6 Brand Commitment

Just as we chose to investigate brand loyalty as a consequence to brand love, we also chose to study brand commitment as a consequence of brand love. The findings showed how a long-term relationship can be created and what would make customers feel engaged and committed to a brand. In order for Boomerang to accomplish a long-term relationship with their customers they make use of a loyalty program called Boomerang Friends (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Within this program they give personal recognition for customers who make repetitive purchases and their aim in the future is to be able to give personal offers to all of their customers based on

their previous purchases (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Sjöström (personal communication, March 27, 2015) stated *“And I believe that this is rather important in order to create a deeper loyalty and to feel that you are truly being noticed and seen”*. Johansson at Björn Borg mentioned that there are a lot of different factors that need to be considered on different levels in order to maintain a long-term relationship with their customers. However, the empathic stance was emphasized and seen as one key notion in increasing the commitment towards the brand as well as keeping the standard of the products on a high level (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). That it is a lot of aspects that needs to be taken into consideration when creating a long-term relationship with the customers is also paid attention to by Söderlind when pointing out the importance of always being able to deliver on every level. *“To make sure that we always deliver quality in material, sense of fashion, level of fit and a surprising feeling”* (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

In order to create a good picture of the brand and to create a long-term relationship with their customers, Andersson at Fjällräven mentioned that it is needed to provide the right products and to exceed customer expectations. *“What we do is that, of course be in the cutting edge when it comes to products, and...also then emphasize this. We have an event that is called Fjällräven Classic which, the last years have, kind of like the Vätternrundan or Vasaloppet that gets sold out in, it is 2000 spots that gets sold out in a couple of minutes. And this type of event also contributes to the level of our history, what we want and what we actually do”* (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

During the interviews with the customers different reasons for repurchasing the brand was brought up. One customer at Boomerang said, *“It is the fact that I have been satisfied with the clothes that I have purchased from them before”* (2). A more indifferent view from another customer at Boomerang was *“Coincidence...If I would need a shirt I would of course go to Boomerang and check. If it is close by or if it is a department with Boomerang or similar and if they would have something good looking then I would buy it”* (3). For one of the Björn Borg interviewees, the same underlying reasons existed for wanting to buy the brand again and to increase the commitment to the brand, namely the availability and variability of the brand (5). *“It would be interesting if they expanded their assortment a bit. In my eyes it feels as if they have created a niche towards underwear and there they are very skilled at using colors and patterns, which I believe is very innovative...It would have been interesting if they would have reached out to more stores and brought more products. Because right now I feel that it is not that much. It is still underwear that many stores are selling.”* (5)

Concerning the level of engagement and commitment towards the brand the interviewed customer of Dagmar stated *“yes, I think that I am pretty engaged since I know some things about them and, like I mentioned previously, working in a store like this you have the opportunity to practice every time you get to explain to a customer, about a garment, ‘well this is three sisters and it is a Swedish brand and they have recently won this prize, and they work a lot with these things and this is their key garment and so forth’, so you get somewhat of a relation to the brand in a sense, so I believe that I am, relatively”* (8). Customers 4, 5, and 8 expressed themselves as being committed to their brand whilst customer 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 did not feel committed. One of the customers that did not feel committed to the brand in question viewed this as an outcome of not being

inside their target group completely and stated *“as I said, it is a bit more of wanting to be there than I actually am, I mean if I would have been this outdoorsy person or I mean someone who works a lot outdoors, if I would have needed this type of clothing more, then I would probably have been more committed and engaged in the brand, because I do think it is a good brand”* (6). On what the company could do to make her more committed towards the brand she continued by saying *“I may not be their target group completely, and therefore it is hard to say how they could make me more committed and engaged because then they would almost have to change their, change parts of their style somewhat, and then the value of the brand would disappear”* (6). This thought was also shared with customer 8, who upon the question as to how the brand could make her feel more committed to the brand stated *“I mean that is hard, you can not really demand so much from the brand because they have their style and I would not want them to change it since, they can not attract everyone. However, I do feel that in some way it is good that you perhaps not, it does show on a width in the brand if you do not want everything”* (8). When it comes to increasing the commitment towards the brand it is stated by one of Björn Borg’s customers that *“Well, just simply continuing to, to continue with this renewal process which I find them to be very good at...I believe that they are super good at design, the process of design, to succeed in always creating something new”* (5).

6. THEMATIC NETWORK ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter we will analyse and discuss our empirical findings by applying a thematic network analysis. Using our theoretical frame of reference we will interpret and analyse themes discovered in the findings to previous research. Three thematic networks will be presented along with each network's global theme. These global themes are brand experience, brand perception and brand development. Further on, a deeper discussion of the findings will be presented in order to answer the stated research question.

6.1 Brand Experience

The first global theme that we have identified is called Brand Experience. This global theme describes how the company representatives view the characteristics of the brand as well as how they wish their consumers should feel by using the brand. It further entails the other end of the spectrum, what feelings the customer associate with the specific brands and also the characteristics that are important in a brand. We labelled this global theme Brand Experience based on two organizational themes, named Brand Characteristics and Empowerment of the Self. These organizational themes were in turn based on different basic themes, which were found in the empirical findings and which will be presented along the description of this global theme. This thematic network, together with the two other identified networks can be found in Appendix 3.

A brand's characteristics and the experience that results from using the brand can be seen as an essential part in brand management literature. It is emphasized that a brand is supposed to entail the unique features of the product and sequentially represent the whole experience a customer can have with the product (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 740; Mallik, 2009, p. 9). Due to this essential role that experience and characteristics of a brand has in brand management, we find that this global theme largely coincides with the theoretical field. Moreover, we argue that due to the fact that this global theme comprises an extensive part of our results it further gives strong emphasis to the importance of considering brand experience and brand characteristics in brand management. In this way, this finding strengthens the already existing literature in this research field.

The feeling of safety was brought up during the interviews, both by some of the company representatives as well as by the consumers. Company representatives mentioned the feeling of safety in different ways. One manner in which safety was mentioned is that customers shall feel secure that the products they purchase from the brand will be of high quality (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). The word security is also mentioned as a feeling that should exist in relation to the brand and the level of quality that you associate with the brand (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). Therefore one of the basic themes was 'It is important that the customer feel safe when purchasing the brand and have no doubts about its quality'. We see this as a risk reduction approach. Kapferer (1997) explained that a strong brand may imply less risk for a company and for a customer. We see that

having the ambition of consumers feeling safe with the brand and feel secure of the product's quality can represent as risk reducing, in the sense that the consumer experiences less risk associated with the brand.

The other manner in which the safety feeling was mentioned was in relation to when the consumers wore the brand. We see that the company representatives are inclined to send positive messages associated with their brand such as safety, pride and magnificence. We associated these findings with empowerment and basic themes such as 'The brand should bring feelings of safety and pride' and 'The brand should bring feelings of strength and magnificence' were identified. These feelings cannot be explicitly seen as a pattern in the responses from the consumers, however two consumers touched upon such empowering feelings. One expressed that a sense of pride were associated with wearing the brand (8). Another one touched upon it when explaining his love for the brand and he emphasized the feeling he had from wearing the brand (4). Also, very negative feelings were mentioned in association with the scenario of the brand not being available any longer. Customers who also felt love for the brands expressed feelings of distress, longing and sadness in relation to this fictional scenario. On the basis of these findings we discovered basic themes such as 'The unavailability of the brand is associated with feelings of distress and insecurity' and 'It is the feelings from wearing the brand that are important'. This can be seen in literature regarding emotional branding, specifically emotional brand attachment, where Thomson (2005, p. 78) explains that the feelings of distress can be felt if threatened with a possible separation from the attachment object. This is clearly supported by these brand-loving customers. So even though the positive feelings is not exactly replicated in the data given, it would appear that patterns of emotional branding are visible.

The feeling of satisfaction was a common notion in the empirical findings. We saw this from both the company representatives' point of views and from the consumers' point of views. Therefore it was evident as a basic theme in our thematic network analysis. The feeling of satisfaction accompanied to a brand or product can be thought of as a traditional customer outcome, which is identified as being an antecedent to emotional affection towards brands (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1055). In the empirical findings we can see that all of the consumers that we interviewed could say that they had positive feelings towards the specific brands and that they felt feelings of satisfaction. Some also expressed love. The majority of the company representatives emphasized some level of emotionality in their branding strategies. One of the company representatives gave greater emphasis on this and explained that the empathic part of the brand is what would make customers develop love and commitment towards their brand (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). The customers who were interviewed in relation to that specific brand also expressed both love and commitment. However, it was not all of these customers who wanted to express love for the specific brands. We therefore see that even though emotional branding is used as a strategic tool, and the antecedent to emotional brand attachment (satisfaction in this scenario) is achieved, it does not necessarily imply that the customers experience brand love. We reason that this rather is a sign of brand love being a complex construct.

From our findings we have perceived that the empathic part of a brand plays an important role in the development of brand love. Our interpretation is that by emphasizing an empathic part of a brand, brand love is indirectly part of the marketing strategy of a brand. We see that brand love is in that case part of the marketing strategy

in the sense that it later on can work as a facilitator to increase loyalty and commitment towards a brand. The empathic part of a brand and the influencing power it may have was evident in one of our participating brands. It was clear, from our standpoint, that when a brand focused on the empathic part we noticed that their customers were affected by it and developed brand love and later on brand commitment as well as brand loyalty. We believe that this development of brand love and the outcomes that follows were facilitated by this empathic part of the specific brand. This finding is similar to previous research in emotional branding where it is stated that it is important to grasp the consumer's emotional needs in order to retain customers (Gobé, 2009, p. xviii). We further interpret this finding as implying that the acknowledgement of brand love is important within strategic marketing of brands. This interpretation differs from previous research. Moussa (2015, p. 80) argues for managers to be careful with investing in brand love, since it has not been proved that brand love can lead to increased sales. Despite of this, we remain firm with our interpretation and this finding adds to the discussion within the literature on brand love and its relevance.

A common notion in the empirical findings was the importance of the associated quality with a brand. It was often mentioned in relation to satisfied customers and that the quality of the particular brand was what made the customers make repurchases according to them. It was also brought up by one of the company representatives who said that if their brand would not be able to maintain the quality in their garments they would soon lose the affection their customers have for their brand (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Another company representative connected the term of satisfaction to loyalty and said that satisfied customers are loyal customers (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). She also said that a company could not get loyal customers by faking its products (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Due to these findings, a basic theme was named as 'Quality is an important brand characteristic' and these findings were also used as basis for the basic theme 'The products bring feelings of satisfaction'. Both of these basic themes were clustered as brand characteristics. As can be seen in the brand loyalty literature, an indirect antecedent to brand loyalty is said to be satisfaction (Amine, 1998, p. 311). We further understand this as stressing that the brand's associated quality is important in the clothing industry. A high level of quality appears to be a much contributing factor as to why the consumers are experiencing the feeling of satisfaction and make repurchases of the specific clothing brand.

We have noticed in our empirical findings that satisfaction can be assumed to facilitate the development of brand loyalty. This can be seen as a confirmation of previous research conducted by Amine (1998, p. 311) who viewed satisfaction as an indirect antecedent to brand loyalty. However, we can see in our findings that this is only connected to the consumers who we determined to be congruent. Hence, the non-congruent consumers, who still felt satisfaction for the brand, did not develop brand loyalty. We see this as a development of the notion of satisfaction as an antecedent to brand loyalty and conclude that it is only valid when the consumers' brand image is congruent with the brand identity of the company.

A salient statement was made from one of the company representatives regarding the issue of credibility and consequentially a basic theme was identified. It was said that a brand needs to be able to create a feeling of credibility among the customers in order for them to experience brand love and brand commitment (K. Söderlind, personal

communication, April 17, 2015). This was brought up as well by another company representative, however in a slightly different view. It was stated that the real strength of the brand was that it had a real story with which the customers could identify themselves (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). This can be connected to affective commitment described by Evanschitzky et al. (2006, p. 1208), namely that affective commitment is experienced partly when customers can identify themselves with the brand. For affective commitment to occur it is also needed that the customer experience love for the brand (Fullerton, 2003, p. 334). To once again connect to the first statement where credibility was brought up as an important brand characteristic in order to achieve brand commitment, we see that credibility can also be thought of as a characteristic of trust. In that sense, this statement can be seen in another area of the commitment literature as well. Specifically the trust-commitment model, originally developed by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and then further developed by Albert & Merunka (2013) to include brand love as a step between brand trust and brand commitment. We see then that this relationship coincides with the statement made by one of the company representatives. Namely, that a brand needs to contain a sense of credibility for the customer to develop brand love and consequently brand commitment (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

6.2 Brand Connection

The second global theme that we were able to identify was Brand Connection. We were able to make this identification based on the fact that a larger extent of the data contained notions as to how customers were to connect with a brand and create a relationship with a brand. This content of data ranges from what the company representatives consider as identification factors and relationship-building aspects of their respective brands, to how the interviewed customers saw themselves as connected to the brand and in what manner they are connected in that case. The organizational themes that were identified and which together are summed up as brand connection are identified as Brand Ancestry, Brand Relationships, Brand Aspiration and Brand Love.

From investigating the empirical findings we found that the company representatives presented both brand characteristics as well as identification factors as important. We choose to view these aspects as manners in which customers can connect with the respective brand, in terms of brand ancestry and brand relationships. One company representative stressed that it is incredibly important to remember the history of a brand and it was emphasized that it was with the brand's history that customers would identify themselves with (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). He further explained that their customers could identify themselves with the brand's history in the sense that the brand has been with the customers for generations (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Therefore he argued that their brand has a real story with which the customers can identify themselves (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Based on these findings we identified the basic theme 'A brand's history and identity are important aspects to consider' and this theme was part of the organizational theme brand ancestry. The literature on emotional branding can be connected to the empirical findings within this thematic network. One antecedent to emotional attachment is traditional customer outcomes (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, p. 1055). In relation to our thesis, we identified this as being the notion of satisfaction, which was frequently brought up in the empirical findings and placed

under the global theme of brand experience. However, in relation to this identification factor being a brand's history, it can be connected to the theory of emotional attachment as well. Another antecedent to emotional attachment discovered by Grisaffe & Nguyen (2011, p. 1057) is said to be sentimental/emotional memory where a brand can create emotional attachment by playing on nostalgic cues by reminding the customer of a place, a person or a specific time. In this sense, we believe it is relevant to view this identification factor of the brand's history as a means to also evoke emotional attachment among the customers.

Continuing on the subject of emotional attachment, we have throughout the findings noticed different signs of emotional brand attachment antecedents. Examples of some of these are satisfaction and nostalgia. These antecedents can be found in previous research regarding emotional brand attachment where they are labelled as traditional customer outcomes and sentimental/emotional memory (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011, pp. 1055-1057). In addition to this, we would like to identify another antecedent in our findings, namely credibility. This is not seen in previous research regarding emotional brand attachment and therefore we argue that this has theoretical contribution to this field of research. However, the importance of credibility is noticed in the literature on commitment. We make this connection with having the trust-commitment model in mind as developed by Albert & Merunka (2013) where brand love is included. In this model, brand trust regards how the consumer relies on the brand to meet the expectation that the consumer might have on the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 260). We see that this is similar to the meaning of credibility as it can be seen in our findings. Since brand love is included in this model, it is then arguable that credibility as an antecedent to emotional attachment in this case can facilitate the development of brand love, and therefore indirectly facilitate the development of brand commitment.

Returning to the issue of identification, a manner in which identification was brought up in relation to connecting to customers was in terms of the brand itself. One company representative stated that they were targeting people who themselves could identify with the values and culture of the company (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). This finding resulted in 'The DNA of a company is connected with the identification between brand and customers' as a basic theme. This can be connected to the literature of brand identity as well as brand image. Roy & Banerjee (2008, p. 142) explains that a brand's identity should contain what the brand has to offer to the consumer, and this can include a set of values, its attributes, its personality etc. Notions such as culture, physique (attributes) and personality are all facets within the Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2004, pp. 107-108). Brand image, on the other hand, is something that suggests how the signals of the brand, are perceived by the customer (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 5; Kapferer, 2004, p. 98; Nandan, 2005, p. 267). We make the interpretation that a company may target those customers whose brand image is congruent with the brand identity. A brand identity that matches the brand image is said to have a larger chance of increasing brand loyalty (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). In this sense, our interpretation would also indicate that a company could indirectly target customers who are more likely to develop brand loyalty. We believe this adds relevance for managers of knowing their own brand identity together with their brand culture in order to be able to reach out to the customers most receptive to the brand. It further adds significance to the already existing literature on brand identity and brand image.

Since the aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how brand love can facilitate the development of brand loyalty and brand commitment among customers a comprehensive part of our findings concerns the notion of relationships. As mentioned earlier brand love, as a marketing term, was introduced by Shimp & Madden (1988, p. 163) where they inserted the idea of interpersonal love into an object-person relationship. The empirical findings regarding relationships were not as strong as we would have thought at the start of our data collection, however it can be visible in different shapes throughout our findings. We see that the desire to create a long-term relationship exists among the majority of the company representatives. In order to do so, they give different suggestions as to how they would achieve such a long-term relationship. One company representative explains that it is essential to be able to deliver on every level, from level of quality to the level of fashion (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). Another one says that customers need to be personally recognized and through loyalty programs one can achieve deeper loyalty as well as a long-term relationship (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). These findings resulted in a basic theme identified as, 'It is beneficial to create a relationship between customer and brand in terms of commitment'. The desire for wanting a long-term relationship with customers is equal to wanting customers to experience brand commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 261; Evanschitzky et al., 2006, p. 1208). Also, brand commitment has been identified as being a consequence of brand love (Albert et al., 2009; Batra et al., 2012). Therefore, we interpret that this desire for a long-term relationship can be thought of as a sign of a desire to get their customers to experience brand love, even though it is not explicitly stated.

To return to the long-term relationship and its associated loyalty, a common notion of what constitutes loyalty could be discovered. And that was that loyalty was associated with repurchasing the brand. This explanation of loyalty can also be seen in brand loyalty literature where loyalty is described as having a behavioural approach or an attitudinal approach (Amine, 1998, p. 306). More specifically, repurchasing of the brand is how loyalty takes form according to the behavioural approach (Amine, 1998, p. 306). However, we could also see the attitudinal approach of consumer loyalty in our findings. One company representative explains that to them, brand loyalty is something more than just a monetary transaction (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). This coincides with how brand loyalty is expressed with an attitudinal approach, where a positive attitude towards the brand is also needed in order to achieve true brand loyalty (Amine, 1998, p. 306). It then becomes evident that our findings resemble previous literature in terms of both of the loyalty approaches.

A basic theme that we found in the empirical findings was "The identification between brand and customers involve a certain lifestyle attitude among the customers". One company representative mentioned that their most regular customers are not present within a certain age range instead they rather have a specific lifestyle (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). A certain lifestyle could also be seen by some of the customers, who for example described a specific brand as used by a certain type of people, such as these 'sporty people' (5). Research by Srivastava & Kamdar (2009, p. 85) shows that the brand image formation will be more consistent when the consumer's involvement in the product category is higher. Connecting this to a certain lifestyle we could assume that having a certain lifestyle and therefore a higher involvement in the product category in which the brand is present, will lead to a brand image formation consistent with the company's brand identity. This connection can be

seen in one of our chosen brands and the customers interviewed in relation to that brand, where the two customers consider themselves to be part of the sporty segment that the company is trying to reach by its sporty DNA (4; 5; P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). We argue that a certain lifestyle adds to previous research as a way to increase the consumer's involvement in a product category, like in the clothing retail industry.

A study conducted by Dolich (1969, p. 80) shows that how well brand images matches consumers' self-image is related to the consumers' choice of brands. In previous literature it is mentioned that in order to create an emotional bond between a brand and a consumer it is needed to match the brand's personality with the consumer's self, however, the question is whether the personality of the brand should match the actual or ideal notion of self that the consumer possesses (Malär et al., 2011, p. 35). Our empirical findings show that the majority of customers use one of the mentioned brands to fulfil their ideal image of themselves. Our reflection on this is that it might be so that consumers are more inclined towards using a brand if they feel as if it helps them achieve their ideal images of themselves. When it comes to the company representatives only one of them felt as if their customers should use their brand in order to fulfil their ideal selves (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). The others think that it is extremely hard to say either or, and that it is rather up to the individual to decide.

An empathic attitude has been noticed in our empirical findings. According to one of the company representatives it is not until a customer feel in his or her heart that they truly identify with the brand, that it is possible for them to become really loyal to the brand (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Previous literature shows that brands must understand the consumers and their distinctive needs in order for the consumers to want to develop a relationship with the brands (Gobé, 2009, p. 29-30). The crucial question is according to Travis (2000, p. 9) how the customers feel about the specific brand. If consumers feel in their hearts that they identify with the brand we can assume that the brand in question have figured out what the consumers need, that the brand actually understands them. By this understanding, a relationship can be formed and loyalty can be developed.

One of the participating company representatives mentioned that they as a company and a brand have taken an active position for love and that it is this empathic part of the brand that differentiates them from others and what will make their customers develop a devotion towards the brand (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Previous research has shown that it is necessary to understand the emotional needs and desires of people in order to be successful (Gobé, 2009, p. xviii). This empathic part of a brand can also be seen in other parts of the empirical findings as well. One company representative talks about its brand and emphasizes that the brand should be like a good old friend that you can trust (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). He also emphasizes that they want their customers to be their friends and that they are pushing towards a relationship rather than a transaction between their customers and the company (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). As already mentioned before one company representative highlighted the importance of a company history, and that it is with the history that the customers identify themselves with (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). We believe that this can also be connected to the empathic attitude that has been identified. He further mentions that a

lot of their customers have family members who have used the brand previous to them (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). This can be noticed in one of the customer responses in relation to this brand, where a customer mentions that she associates the brand with her father and that he has always used the brand and hence, it has influenced her in her choice of brand (6). Therefore, it is not surprising that customers choose brands with which they in a sense have a previous personal connection to. Once again we can see that the emotional attachment antecedent of sentimental/emotional memory is visible, and hence our findings strengthen previous research of emotional branding even further.

6.3 Brand Development

The third and final global theme found in the thematic network analysis is Brand Development. Brand development concerns what is viewed as important, for both consumers as well as the companies, in order for the brand to have a successful future. The global theme was identified as brand development based on three organizational themes. These organizational themes were Holistic View, Brand Development and Brand Future. Based on various basic themes, groups were formed, which developed into these organizational themes. These basic themes were identified in our empirical findings and will be further discussed when describing the foundations of this global theme.

We can see that there is a coherent view from both the consumers and the company representatives in that it is extremely important for a brand to stay true to itself and always remember the core. This is why it constitutes one of our basic themes in the thematic networks. Remembering the core and staying true to the brand is seen as important mainly in the process of retaining customers. This could be connected to Kapferer's (2004, pp. 108-109) Brand Identity Prism and the facet that concerns the brand's culture. According to Kapferer (2004, pp. 108-109) the culture of a brand, that is the values that inspires the brand, plays a crucial role in the differentiation from other brands. From our findings it can be seen that companies in a sense should focus on their strengths and not try to adapt their brand to fit everyone. A common notion among the interviewed customers is that they see it as important to follow trends and continuously develop the brand but the core of the brand must always be kept in mind.

Nandan (2005, p. 271) also stresses the importance of staying true to the brand and its core. The consistency in the brand concept is stressed in order for the connection between identity and image to increase (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). Like mentioned earlier, previous literature also shows that brand loyalty is believed to be greater when a strong tie is present between brand identity and brand image (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). From our point of view it seems vital for companies to stay true to its brand and remembering the core, leading to a consistency in the perception of the brand and hence towards greater brand loyalty. It is mentioned by one of the company representatives that it is important not to be generic in the marketing of the brand and that instead companies should take the risk and be different, and stand out in the crowd (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). We see that this can also be linked to the importance of keeping the core of the brand and staying true to it in the sense that a company should focus on the things that they are good at and dare to stand out against their competitors and not trying to please everyone by developing products that might not be

their niche. Research performed by Park et al., (1986, p. 136) also suggest that when developing brand images companies should only choose one need to focus on due to the possible difficulty in managing a generic image.

The importance of this core concept is also emphasized in brand management literature. As can be seen in the brand hexagon model, a brand's core value is at the centre of the model (Urde, 1999, p. 127). In his work, Urde (1999) emphasizes that brands should be thought of as strategic resources. Further in the brand hexagon model, the core value of the brand is communicated through how the brand is positioned in relation to its competitors (Urde, 1999, p. 127). By this positioning, the brand's identity is communicated (Urde, 1999, p. 127). We consider brand development as a way to utilize brands as strategic resources and hence it seems relevant to embrace the core value of a brand at the centre of this development, just as a brand's values are at the centre of the brand hexagon model. Due to the fundamental role that the core and staying true to the brand has in our empirical findings we can see that it corresponds to the importance and space it has been given in previous research. With this in mind, we see that our findings reinforce the current literature in this field of research.

Other salient basic themes that we found in the empirical findings were the importance of considering the complete brand experience, the totality of a brand, and that a company must be able to always deliver. The significance in considering the entire brand experience can also be seen in our first global theme and the development of that theme. However, when mentioned before, brand experience referred to all the basic themes and organizational themes, which together represented a part of the experience of a brand. Whereas in this sense, it is more referring to the importance of remembering everything that constitutes a brand, the totality, and that making changes to one part of the brand may affect other parts. It is mentioned by some of the interviewed company representatives that it is important to have a company culture that impregnate the entire organization and how things are being executed within the company (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015), a certain mind-set that is reflected in the brand and everything else (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). There are both stronger and weaker notions of this in the empirical findings. A weaker sign, a carnation of the company mind-set, can be seen when one of the company representatives mentioned that they do not have any particular actions that they take in order to create habitual loyalty rather that their efforts put towards this has to come naturally in all that they do, a love in what they do that hopefully shines through everything (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015). The theory developed by M'zungu et al. (2010, p. 612) with a three-stage model in how to manage brands strategically covers this importance mentioned by the interviewees. The first step in the model is to integrate a brand orientation mind-set within the entire company where the brand should be considered a strategic asset in every activity performed (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 612). The second step in the model covers the importance that people working with the brand shall feel connected to the brand, be living the brand in a sense (M'zungu et al., 2010, p. 612). Due to the significance that a company culture has been given in our empirical findings we argue that it highly contributes to the already existing literature within this field.

Previous literature (Janonis & Virvilaitė, 2007; Nandan, 2005; Roy & Banerjee, 2008) mentions the importance of alignment between the company view and the customers' views of the brand. A certain discrepancy in the development was noticed by two of the

company representatives being interviewed (K. Söderlind, personal communication, April 17, 2015; P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015), and hence it naturally became one of our basic themes in the thematic networks. A discrepancy where the company is further ahead in its thinking than what their customers are. One company representative explained it in a way that we found very logical and understandable. The company representative explained it as them being in the front of the train where they can see the next corner whilst their customers are in the end of the train and cannot see the things happening right now (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). It is understandable that the company needs to be further ahead in their thinking and development of the brand since we are discussing clothing retailers, and they always need to plan for their next collection even though they are fully occupied with the current. However, we find it important that the company keep in mind that their customers are behind in their thinking and will therefore not perceive things in the same way as the company and that this may affect their loyalty towards the brand. With findings of this discrepancy we believe that we have been able to add to the theoretical field in the sense that previous research have not shown upon such a discrepancy within brand management in a clothing retail industry. A discrepancy that we believe is vital to take into consideration when aiming at retaining customers in the best way possible.

The term innovation was brought up during the interviews by some of the customers both as a brand characteristic when describing the different brands in this thesis, as well as what customers felt was important for clothing companies to adopt in order to keep their customers. Therefore it constitutes one of our basic themes. Accompanied with an innovative mind-set is the act of staying true to the character of the brand to reach customer retention. Two customers of the same brand mention the importance of constantly reinventing yourself as a brand but at the same time you should be able to recognize the brand's products and hence it is vital that you remember your own concept (4; 5). It is described as a balance between not changing the core and still being able to rejuvenating the brand (4). The same two customers also experience love for the brand and feel loyal and committed to the brand in question (4; 5). We therefore argue that being innovative as a brand can therefore be seen as a means in achieving brand commitment and loyalty. A notion, which has not been emphasized in previous literature and therefore this finding, contributes to the research field.

Achieving a long-term relationship with its customers is seen as very important for company representatives and therefore a given basic theme in our thematic networks. However, there are a lot of things that need to be fulfilled in order to obtain a long-term relationship, seen from both the company's side as well as the customer's side. The inclination of the consumer to have a long-term relationship with the brand is referred to as brand commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013, p. 261; Evanschitzky et al., 2006, p. 1208). As can be seen in our empirical findings there are several things that according to the customers are necessary for them to develop a long-term relationship with a brand, experiencing so called brand commitment. Availability and variability of the brand's products is by some customers seen as a reason for buying the brand again and to develop a commitment towards the brand as well as developing loyalty towards a brand. Therefore, we believe that it is perfectly reasonable to assume that a brand's variability and availability can facilitate the development of commitment towards a brand in the sense that it leads to a more consistent relationship.

This long-term relationship can be connected to the importance of having a long-term thinking as a company, which is being mentioned, by one of the company representatives as a means in achieving brand loyal customers (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Previous literature has stressed the importance of commitment viewing it as an essential antecedent to the occurrence of true brand loyalty (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995, p. 314). A company representative mentioned the importance of fulfilling and exceeding customer expectations as a way to create a long-term relationship with their customers (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Fulfilling and exceeding customer expectations can be related to previous literature, which shows that giving and keeping promises as well as fulfilling obligations has to be developed before retailers can expect their customers to display loyalty (Ndubisi, 2006, p. 56). Hence, our findings contribute in verifying previous research within the area of brand loyalty. It is also mentioned to be important as a company to deliver personal recognition and to, in the future, be able to provide personal offers to its customers in order to achieve a long-term relationship and to create a deeper loyalty to the brand (P. Sjöström, personal communication, March 27, 2015). This personal recognition seems to be, in our opinion, a great way to attract and retain customers. It can be connected to emotional branding and the stated fact that emotional preferences are involved in consumers' choice of brands (Travis, 2000, p. 10). Providing personal recognition can be seen as a way to connect to the customers and a feeling of connection as well as passion and love is what characterizes emotional brand attachment according to previous literature (Thomson et al., 2005, p. 78). Therefore, it seems relevant to focus on personal offers as a brand and by this, taking advantage of customers' emotional preferences, in order to be able to retain them. We argue that our findings of the importance, as a company, in providing personal recognition to its customers, provides a further development and adds to the already existing research performed in this field.

6.4 Congruence

From these global themes we have looked into the data more closely to see if the customers that were interviewed had a congruent brand image with the respective brand's brand identity as given by the company representatives. As can be seen in the literature regarding brand identity and brand image, congruence between the two increases the possibility of achieving brand loyalty (Nandan, 2005, p. 271). In order to answer our research question we first need to clarify which customers we determined to have congruent brand images with the companies' different brand identities. Our judgement was based on similar patterns between the portrayal of the brand and its characteristics, as the companies and the customers described it. To discover where a congruence between brand identity and brand image existed was of significance to this thesis because a deeper understanding if such a congruence, with the support of brand love, can lead to the development of brand loyalty and brand commitment is what we wish to accomplish with this thesis. We found that some of the interviewed customers had a congruent brand image with their brand when comparing it with the brand identity as described by the company representatives (1; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8). We also noticed that some of the consumers did not have a congruent image of the brand and it was also seen that these consumers did not experience brand love or brand commitment according to themselves (2; 3). However, it was also noticed in the empirical findings that even though the customers who had a congruent brand image with the company's intended

brand identity, they did not always expressed themselves as experiencing brand love or brand commitment (1; 6; 7).

TABLE 3. KEY FINDINGS BASED ON CUSTOMER INTERVIEWS

Customer	Congruency between Brand Identity and Brand Image	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty	Brand Commitment
1	Yes: Similar target group and symbolization.	No: Very satisfied, temporary loss.	Yes: Returning due to satisfaction.	No: Not experiencing commitment.
2	No: Lack coherent views with company.	No: Replaceable.	No: Lack feelings of loyalty.	No: Not experiencing commitment.
3	No: Lack coherent views with company.	No: Replaceable.	No: Issue of availability	No: Not experiencing commitment.
4	Yes: Experiencing feelings requested by the company.	Yes: Warm feelings, feeling of safety, would miss the brand.	Yes: Consistent purchases.	Yes: Feels committed.
5	Yes: Identifies with the brand's DNA.	Yes: Expresses love and a concern if no longer available.	Yes: Consistent purchases.	Yes: Feels committed.
6	Yes: Recognizes the same target group as the company and the identity of the brand.	Yes: Expresses love and a concern if no longer available.	Yes: Influenced by family members.	No: Does not feel part of the target group.
7	Yes: Similar target group and profile of the brand.	No: Positive feelings but replaceable.	Yes: Experiences loyalty towards the brand.	No: Not experiencing commitment.
8	Yes: Similar brand characteristics as company.	Yes: Really likes the brand, expresses concern if no longer available.	Yes: Increases with knowledge of the brand.	Yes: Feels engaged.

Like seen above we found that six of the eight interviewed customers could be considered as having a congruent brand image with the brand identity of the specific brand they were interviewed in regards to. However, we could also notice that some of the congruence among the customers could be considered stronger whilst some showed upon a weaker congruence. To further specify how our judgement about this congruence have been made, arguments for each will now be provided.

The first customer we determined to be congruent was customer 1 interviewed for Boomerang. We interpreted him to be congruent with the brand's identity on the basis of his description of himself being in the target group of Boomerang and how he described this target group to be like. We also saw a pattern upon what the Boomerang brand symbolizes. It was said that the brand and its logo meant that you as a customer

would return to the brand for repurchases because of your satisfaction with the brand (1). This can be related to the description of the brand's personality as described by the company representative. Sjöström (personal communication, March 27, 2015) emphasized that the Boomerang brand should be thought of as an old friend and they aim at creating a relationship with their customers. Sjöström (personal communication, March 27, 2015) also mentioned the "Boomerang Effekten", a term connected to environmental thinking as well as quality thinking of their products, in the sense that what you provide to the customers you always risk getting back. Our interpretation of this is that underlying the arguments provided by the company representative, there is a will of having returning customers. We therefore see this "Boomerang Effekten" in the customer's argumentation as well and conclude that he is congruent with the Boomerang brand.

We determined both of the Björn Borg customers interviewed to have a congruent brand image with the company's brand identity. This determination was made much based on the associated feelings the customers had with wearing the brand and how the company representative wanted their customers to feel while wearing the brand. During the discussion with customer 4 he mentioned different feelings, both in terms of describing the Björn Borg brand's personality as well as his own feelings when wearing the brand. Such feelings mentioned were confidence, comfort, warmth, safety and satisfaction (4). The company representative explained that by wearing the Björn Borg brand, customers should feel strong, magnificent and attractive (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). Through our analysis, we have grouped these feelings as a theme of empowering feelings. Together with the fact that the empathic part of the Björn Borg brand is much emphasized by Johansson (personal communication, March 26, 2015), we believe customer 4 to be strongly congruent. We conclude customer 5 to be congruent as well, we however base this judgement on different aspects. This customer emphasizes the sporty identity of the brand throughout the interview (5). The Björn Borg company is said to have a sporty DNA within its company culture and they are producing sports fashion towards those customers who wants to feel active (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). The Björn Borg brand aims at targeting people who can identify themselves with this specific DNA (P. Johansson, personal communication, March 26, 2015). We see that this is recognizable in customer 5's view of the brand due to him viewing himself as this sporty guy. We see that this relates to company's DNA, and hence we see him as congruent.

We could conclude that both of the interviewed customers of the Fjällräven brand have a congruent brand image to the brand identity of Fjällräven. This determination is based on both the brand's target group as well as the identity of the brand. Andersson (personal communication, March 27, 2015) emphasized the importance of having your own history and identity, and that it is with Fjällräven's history that their customers identify themselves with. He said that it is very common that customers mention relatives that have previously used Fjällräven's products (M. Andersson, personal communication, March 27, 2015). This notion was clearly seen in customer 6's view of the brand. To her, the Fjällräven brand is closely associated with different family members who spend much time outdoors (6). Reoccurring during the interview she mentioned her father as to what the brand reminds her of and he is the main reason for her choosing this brand before other brands (6). We conclude that this shows a strong linkage between the brand and customer 6. In addition to this, customer 6 also describes the target group of Fjällräven as being someone who enjoys the outdoors and is active.

This description is also laid out by customer 7 who says that the profile of the brand suits him rather well since he is an active person who enjoys the outdoors and hiking. This fits the description of the target group provided by the company representative. Andersson (personal communication, March 27, 2015) said that the target group of Fjällräven includes people with a certain lifestyle who enjoy being outdoors. Therefore we conclude customer 6 to have a strong congruence with the brand, while customer 7's congruence is slightly weaker but congruent nonetheless.

The last customer we found to have a congruent brand image with the brand's identity was customer 8 who was interviewed in regards to the brand Dagmar. This determination was based on how customer 8 described the brand as being unique. She stated that they are irreplaceable because of their uniqueness and their ability to go their own way (8). We see that this willingness of going their own way is visible in the company representative's explanation of how they try to get customers to identify themselves with the brand. Söderlind (personal communication, April 17, 2015) said that they aim at creating a personal touch in their brand by being unwilling to follow others and instead do things their own way. We view these statements as showing an underlying understanding of the uniqueness of the brand. Therefore, we also conclude that customer 8 is congruent.

6.5 Conceptual Framework

The following step in order to fully answer our research question is that we need to clarify which of these customers, who were congruent, experienced brand loyalty and brand commitment and what role brand love had in this relation. We noticed that all of those customers who were congruent also experienced themselves as being loyal to the brand. The differences among them was whether or not they experienced brand love and considered themselves as committed to the brand. Those customers who were not experiencing brand love did not consider themselves as being committed to the brand (1; 7). The majority of the customers who experienced brand love also viewed themselves as being committed (4; 5; 8). This could lead to the conclusion that brand commitment is strongly influenced by brand love; however, there is an outlier in the data. Customer 6 did experience brand love but did not consider herself as being committed to the brand. As an explanation to this we have looked into the trust-commitment model, the revised model developed by Albert & Merunka (2013) to also include brand love. From this we can see and assume that customer 6 has not fully gone through all the steps in the model. She has established trust for the brand and developed brand love but has not yet reached the stage of commitment towards the brand. The reason for her not experiencing commitment is something that we cannot fully give an answer to. However, we can reflect upon this and see that it may be due to the simple fact that she did not view herself as part of the brand's target group. Taking the target group into consideration, we can also see that customer 1 who viewed himself as part of the target group of a certain brand did not see himself as either committed to the brand or experiencing brand love. With this said, we cannot say for certain what the reasons for this non-development of commitment are.

From our analysis of the empirical findings we have been able to develop a conceptual framework, which shows upon the connection between the concepts in our research question.

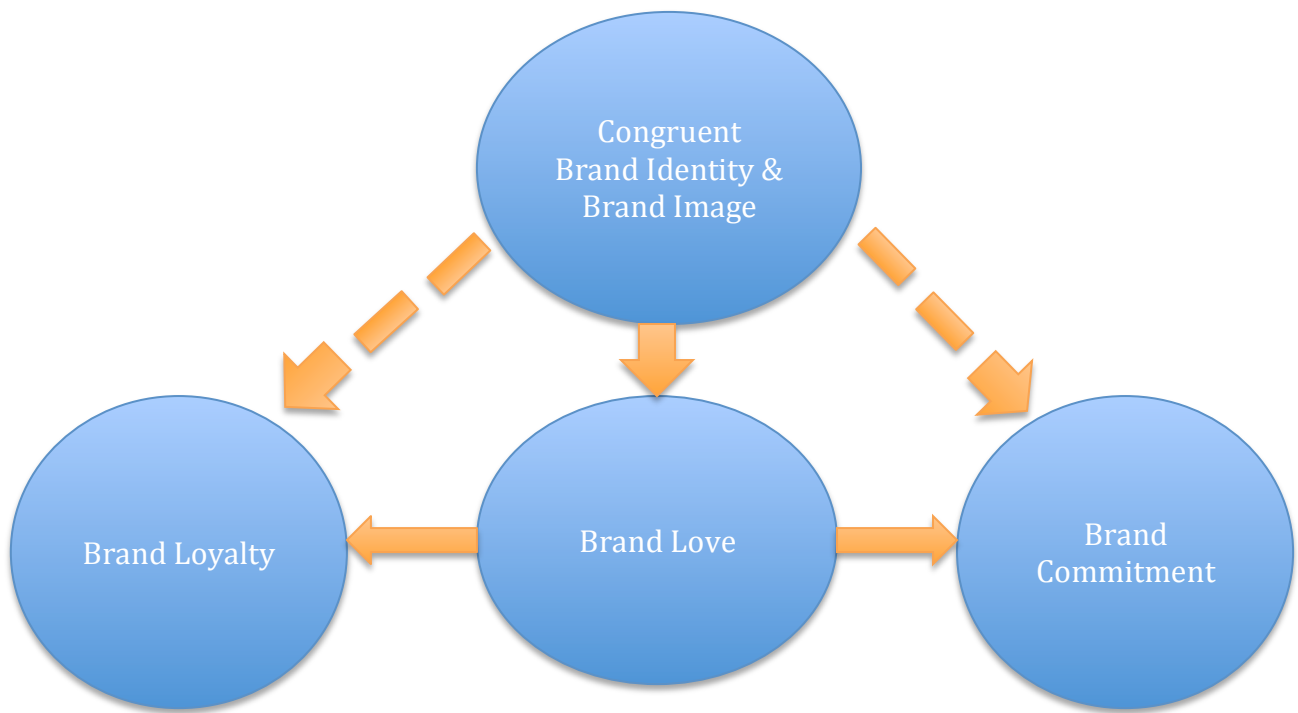


FIGURE 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF BRAND LOVE (OWN MODEL)

7. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will answer the stated research question in this thesis together with our argumentation of this conclusion. We will also present the theoretical contributions and the managerial implications of this thesis. To end this chapter, the limitations of this study will be provided together with our recommendations for future research within this area.

7.1 General Conclusions

The main purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of antecedents and outcomes of brand love. This study advances research on brand management by providing new insights regarding the importance of brand love. A gap was identified within previous research, where we found that further research was needed in the area of where brand love commences. Specifically, the research gap we intend to address is whether or not a congruent brand identity and brand image can lead to brand love and in turn to brand commitment and brand loyalty. The desire to investigate this relation led us to develop the following research question:

How can brand love facilitate the development of brand loyalty and brand commitment through a congruent brand identity and brand image?

To be able to answer this question and fulfil the research purpose within this thesis, we have conducted a qualitative study. In order to discover the potential congruence between brand identity and brand image it was necessary to conduct interviews with both company representatives working with brand management within a clothing retail industry, as well as customers that were thought to be loyal to the specific brands participating in this thesis. A thematic network analysis was made in order to process the empirical findings retrieved from the semi-structured interviews. The analysis led to the development of three global themes being brand experience, brand commitment and brand development. Through this analysis we were able to identify and clarify certain notions considered important to us in regards of being able to answer the research question. These notions have aided the development of our concluding remarks.

The findings of our study demonstrate that the determination of congruence between the companies' brand identities and customers' brand images has been a first step in order to answer our research question. The first conclusion to be derived from this result is that when there is a non-congruency between brand image and brand identity, the development of brand love, brand commitment and brand loyalty will not occur. When congruence between brand identity and brand image existed, we saw the development of different scenarios. We noticed that brand love is thought of as a facilitator to reach brand commitment and brand loyalty and that when brand love is experienced it also aids such a development of brand commitment and brand loyalty. However, even though brand love is experienced it does not necessarily imply that brand commitment exists. We can also conclude that when congruence takes place but without the experience of brand love, brand loyalty can still exist but without brand commitment. These conclusions have enabled us to develop our conceptual framework that shows upon the relation between these important concepts.

We conclude that without an existing congruency between a brand's identity and image it will not be possible to develop brand love, brand commitment or brand loyalty. Therefore, such congruence strongly aids the development of brand commitment and brand loyalty. Brand loyalty can still exist without the facilitation of brand love but that is not applicable to brand commitment according to our findings. However, we do not exclude the possibility of commitment being developed without the facilitation of brand love. This due to the fact that our findings showed that commitment was not necessarily developed even though brand love existed. Furthermore, we can conclude that both brand commitment and brand loyalty can, like mentioned before, be facilitated by brand love and hence, brand love should be emphasized by companies as a strategic marketing tool. We can conclude that one way for brand love to occur is to have a congruent brand identity and brand image. In this sense, congruence can be thought of as an antecedent to brand love and a means for brand love to commence.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contribution of this thesis has largely been made in regards of advancing research on how brand love commences. Our contributions also emphasize the importance of emotionality in brand management. We have identified different contributions made to the theoretical field of brand management in this regard. The results in this thesis have contributed in a manner of strengthening and enhancing the already existing literature. This can clearly be seen in the area of emotional branding within the field of brand management. Throughout our empirical findings, emotional attachments have had great significance. This has been seen from both the perspective of the company representatives and customers participating in this thesis. From our empirical findings we have been able to confirm some of the antecedents to emotional brand attachment found in previous literature. These were traditional customer outcomes and sentimental/emotional memory, which are identified antecedents to emotional brand attachment according to Grisaffe & Nguyen (2011, pp. 1055-1057). We further add to these antecedents by viewing credibility as an antecedent to emotional brand attachment as well.

As can be seen in the research gap, previous literature has shown upon outcomes of brand love such as brand commitment and brand loyalty, but less focus have been on antecedents to brand love (Albert et al., 2009; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand identity and brand image have also been given a lot of focus in previous research, separately as well as the alignment between the two (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Ghodeswar, 2008; Kapferer, 1997, 2004; Nandan, 2005; Ross & Harradine, 2011; Roy & Banerjee, 2008). However, previous studies have not shown upon a connection between brand love, brand identity and brand image. We can theoretically contribute to this by stating that congruency between a brand's identity and image can be seen as an antecedent to brand love. This thesis therefore contributes to the research on how brand love commences and enhances this knowledge by stating that a congruent brand identity and brand image can facilitate the development of brand love.

Like mentioned in the research gap the main focus in previous research has been on the customers (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Sarkar et al., 2012). In this study we have taken both the managerial perspective as well as the

customers' perspectives into consideration and by doing this we have theoretically contributed to the field of brand management. We reason that performing a qualitative study in this field also contributes to the theoretical field. Previous research on brand love has mainly been conducted with a quantitative approach (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, by including the manager perspective as well as conducting a qualitative study, this thesis enhances the field of brand management.

7.3 Managerial Implications

Based on our findings, we will provide managerial implications. Since this study involved four companies and approximately two customers from each company, we suggest practical recommendations in general to companies within the clothing retail industry. We provide these general recommendations to the whole industry instead of individual recommendations to each specific company. This because of the fact that the participation proportions of each company has not been extensive enough in order for us to give valid individual recommendation to each of them.

A certain discrepancy has been visible in the empirical findings regarding the brand identity and the brand image. We believe this is understandable within this specific industry. This because that within the clothing industry, managers need to consider future clothing lines and are therefore further ahead with the company's development than their customers are. It should however be acknowledged that such a discrepancy needs to be kept to a minimum. We connect this to the importance of congruence that was found in our findings. Our recommendation for companies within the clothing retail industry is to keep in mind that there is a discrepancy of the customer's brand image compared to the brand's identity, and that it is important to maintain this discrepancy to a minimum in order for brand love to be able to commence from congruency between brand identity and brand image.

From our empirical findings it has been noticed that it is beneficial for companies to include emotionality in their marketing strategies. It was noticed in our findings that companies, such as Björn Borg who specifically emphasized the emotionality of their brand, received strong emotional responses among their customers. Considering this in combination with the identified emotional antecedents in our findings, we conclude that emotionality should be acknowledged within marketing strategies. Therefore, we recommend companies to consider this and emphasize an empathic standpoint in their brands. We conclude that this can also be connected to the development of personal offers, a notion noticed in the empirical findings. Our argumentation is that personal offers would lead to a stronger personal connection between the brand and its customers and that such a connection would increase the possibility of retaining customers. Hence, our recommendation is that companies within the clothing industry should strongly consider adopting such personal offers.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

It should be acknowledged that there are certain limitations to the performed study within this thesis. Mainly, these limitations concern the richness of the collected data. In regards to work related reasons, we were unable to have a personal meeting with all of the company representatives participating in this thesis. We have collected the data by

telephone and email in regards to two companies. We were prepared to adapt to such circumstances upon approaching the companies for participation. However, we noticed that the interviews that were conducted with the help of a physical meeting provided us with more comprehensive data. Despite of this, we still believe that conducting the interviews in this manner was necessary for us in order to perform this study within the time frame given for this thesis. The advice for future studies is therefore to acknowledge this limitation and solely conduct interviews in person.

Further on, we experienced that the data collected from the interviews held with customers were not as comprehensive as we anticipated beforehand. We found that even though we believed the customers to be devoted to the specific brand since they had a desirable purchase behaviour of the specific brand, this did not necessarily meant that they were particularly connected to the brand. In this sense, we received fewer amounts of data than we would have wanted but still felt that data saturation was reached. Due to some of these limitations, not all customers interviewed had a congruent brand image with the company's brand identity of the brand in which they were interviewed in regards to. If these customers had been congruent as well, further development could have been made in answering the research question. Therefore, we suggest that for future research, further exploring the connection between congruency, brand love, brand loyalty and brand commitment, it should only include customers sure to be congruent.

One limitation of conducting a study of several brands is that it is not possible to go as much in depth as it would be if focusing on a single brand. However, we chose to do so in order to begin the investigation of the connection between brand love, brand identity and brand image. Therefore it would be interesting for future research to only focus on one specific company within the clothing retail industry and to perform a case study. We see it as beneficial to conduct a case study in order to reach an in-depth understanding of the topic and to receive a detailed examination. Therefore, we view it more suitable to only focus on one company and its customers.

8. TRUTH CRITERIA

In this chapter we will discuss how we have met the demands for quality in our research. In order to determine and evaluate the quality of our research we have looked into reliability and validity, two main criteria for establishing the quality of research.

There are various opinions considering quality for qualitative research (Ali & Yusof, 2011, p. 30). Reliability and validity are in quantitative research important criteria in determining the level of quality of the research, however, its relevance for qualitative research has been discussed (Bryman, 2012, p. 389). Views that consider the criteria to still be relevant for qualitative research have reflected upon the possibility that the criteria need to be adapted for qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 389). LeCompte & Goetz (1982) have written about these two criteria in connection to qualitative research but have adjusted their meaning from what it represents in quantitative research. Validity regards the accuracy of research whilst reliability concerns the replicability of research performed (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32). LeCompte & Goetz (1982) have looked into internal validity, external validity, internal reliability and external reliability. These four criteria are what we mainly will base our quality judgement of this thesis on and they will be further explained in the following sections.

8.1 Validity

Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 159) explain validity as “the issue of whether or not an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept”. Establishing validity criteria in qualitative research has been shown to be difficult (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 522). According to Whittemore et al. (2001, p. 522) it is because of the requirement to include rigor, subjectivity and creativity into the scientific process that it is challenging to develop validity standards in research conducted in a qualitative manner. It is vital to look at the whole process of research when thinking about its validity because there is a difference in judging validity of the method and the validity of interpretations being made (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 46). Validity is frequently defined in terms of ‘truth’ (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 42). However, in research on social phenomena, the concept of truth or what is considered true knowledge seems to be rather difficult (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 42). Kuzmanic (2009, 43) states that valid qualitative research is about presenting different interpretations to the reader or representing different social worlds, both done in a credible approach. Researchers must be explicit about their view of what truth refers to when using the notion of validity (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 43). In this thesis we consider truth to be established through conducting interviews and hence our aim is not to present an absolute and certain knowledge but rather to provide a deeper understanding.

Internal validity refers to whether there is a suitable fit between what researchers’ have observed and the development of their theoretical ideas (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). In other words the question is whether or not researchers really are observing or measuring what they think they are (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 43). External validity refers to the extent that the findings from the research can be relevant across groups (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 43), that is the degree to which the results can be generalized within other social settings (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). We believe that due to collecting our data

through semi-structured interviews our internal validity can be considered as high. We argue that using semi-structured interviews have allowed us to investigate what we wanted considering the possibility of asking follow-up questions, depending on the answers that we have received from the participants. We have had the opportunity to steer the focus in order to receive answers to what we have wanted to observe and gain a deeper understanding in. However, we believe that with a higher number of participants and longer interviews, the results of our study would be more valid. Regarding the external validity of our study our aim with this qualitative research has not been to be able to generalize our findings in other settings. The purpose has rather been to gain a deeper understanding of a specific setting and hence we do not view external validity as a relevant problem in our study. Overall, we conclude that our study has a high level of quality and validity.

8.2 Reliability

Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 158) explain reliability as “the consistency of a measure of a concept”. For qualitative researchers it is essential to document the series of moves through the stages of data creation, analysis and interpretation in order to achieve reliability in the research (Ali & Yusof, 2011, p. 35). Reliability requires that researchers using the same methods as in a previous study should be able to reach the same results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 35). Without the exact identification and thorough explanation of the strategies used to gather data replicability would be impossible (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 40). External reliability refers to the degree to which a replication of a study can be made (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Whether members, when multiple, of the research team corresponds to things being observed and agrees upon what they have perceived during observation, is referred to as internal reliability (Bryman, 2012, p. 390).

We argue that we have reached a high level of internal reliability in our study. Throughout the whole process of writing our thesis we have considered it extremely important to always keep an open discussion. When encountering difficulties we have discussed the issue and arrived at a decision that we both support. It was also very important for us to conduct all the interviews together in order to make sure afterwards that we both had perceived things similarly.

The external reliability of this study and its replication possibility are discussable. We have throughout the whole process of conducting our study been very thorough in documenting every step taken, from the very beginning until the end, and clearly explained our choice of theories and concepts as well as how we have analysed our findings. With this we argue that we have tried to enhance the external reliability of our study. The data collected for the purpose of our study have been from various sources. Since the clothing retail industry is a fast pacing industry the results might vary if the study were to be performed using the same methods a few years later. However, we believe that if a similar study would be performed with the same companies and customers within a near future, the results could assumedly be similar. We have collected our data in a manner in which we have found suitable and relevant for our study. We have chosen to ask similar questions to the company representatives as to the participating customers in order to be able to compare the answers in our questions and we believe that an approach like this strengthens the reliability of our study. Therefore,

the external reliability of this study is likely to be acceptable. Overall, we can conclude that the level of reliability in this thesis is highly satisfactory.

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APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW GUIDE MANAGERS

ENGLISH VERSION

General Questions

- Age:
- Male/Female
- How long have you worked at this company?
- What is your role within the company, what is your job assignment?

Brand Management

- What is your current market position?
- Who are your target group?
- Has the target group changed during the time that you have worked here? If yes, in what way?
- Who are your most regular customers?

Brand Identity

- What are the characteristics of the brand? What is it that adds value to the brand?
- How would you describe the brand's personality? If you could only use three words to describe the brand, what would those words be?
- How did the brand originate? What set of values foster the brand's inspiration for further development of the brand?
- What message do you want to send to your customers with your brand?
- What do you do in order for your customers to identify themselves with your brand and to get closer to the brand?
- Do you want your customers to use your brand in order to fulfil their actual self or their ideal self?
- What does your name and logo stand for? What does it symbolize?
- To the extent of your knowledge, is your brand identity coherent with what you believe to be your customers' image of the brand?

Brand Love

- What kind of feelings would you like your customers to bring with them from using your brand?
- What do you think is necessary for customers to feel devotion/love for your brand?
- Is the notion of brand love acknowledged as a strategic marketing tool?
 - If yes, please explain why.
 - If no, please explain why not.

Brand Commitment

- What do you do in order to develop a long-term relationship with your customers?

- What do you think the customers believe affects their devotion towards the brand and makes them want a long-term relationship with your brand? Do you achieve such a relationship in your opinion?

Brand Loyalty

- What is customer loyalty and brand loyalty according to you?
- What do you do in order to create a habitual loyalty to you company/your brand?
- Why do you think that your customers return to your brand?
- What do you think is important in the clothing retail industry, from a company viewpoint, to do in order to retain customers?

SWEDISH VERSION

Bakgrundsfakta

- Ålder:
- Man/Kvinna
- Hur länge har du jobbat här?
- Vad är din roll i företaget, vilka är dina arbetsuppgifter?

Brand Management

- Vilken är er nuvarande position på marknaden?
- Vilken är er nuvarande målgrupp?
- Har er målgrupp ändrats under tiden du har jobbat här? Om ja, på vilket sätt?
- Vilka är ert företags mest regelbundna kunder?

Brand Identity

- Vad är varumärkets karaktärsdrag? Vad skulle du säga är det som tillför värde till varumärket?
- Hur skulle du beskriva varumärkets personlighet? Om du bara fick använda tre ord till att beskriva varumärket, vilka ord skulle det då vara?
- Hur grundades varumärket xxx? Vilka värderingar ligger till grund för utveckling av varumärket?
- Vilket budskap vill ni ge era kunder med hjälp av ert varumärke?
- Hur gör ni för att era kunder skall kunna identifiera sig och komma närmare ert varumärke? Vill ni att kunderna ska använda varumärket för att uppfylla deras nuvarande uppfattning av sig själv som person eller deras ideala bild av sig själv?
- Vad tycker ni att ert namn och symbol (logga) står för? Vad symboliserar det?
- Tror du att er varumärkesbild stämmer överens med era kunders?

Brand Love

- Vad för typ av känslor vill ni att era kunder bär med sig genom användandet av produkter från ert varumärke?
- Vad tror ni är nödvändigt för att kunder ska utveckla tillgivenhet/kärlek till ett varumärke?
- Är konceptet brand love uppmärksammat som ett strategiskt medel i er marknadsföring?

- Om ja, förklara varför.
- Om nej, förklara varför inte.

Brand Commitment

- Hur gör ni för att upprätthålla en god bild av varumärket så att relationen till kunderna blir långvarig?
- Vad tror du att era kunder anser öka deras hängivenhet mot xxx märket och få dem att vilja ha en långvarig relation med ert varumärke? Tror du att ni uppnår en sådan relation utifrån denna definition?

Brand Loyalty

- Vad är kundlojalitet och varumärkeslojalitet enligt dig?
- Hur gör ni för att skapa en beteendemässig lojalitet till ert företag/varumärke?
- Varför tror ni att era kunder återkommer till ert varumärke?
- Vad tror du är viktigt i modebranschen, ur ett företags synvinkel, att göra för att behålla sina kunder?

APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW GUIDE CUSTOMERS

ENGLISH VERSION

General Questions

- Age:
- Male/Female
- How long have you been a customer at xxx?
- When was the last time you purchased from xxx?

Brand Image

- Do you identify yourself with others who are using the brand?
- To what extent is the brand used by people similar to you?
- How do you express yourself as a person? Would you say that you are using the brand in order to fulfil the current view of yourself as a person (the actual self) or the ideal self?
- How would you describe the brand's personality? If you could only use three words to describe the personality of the brand, what would those words be?
- What are the characteristics of the brand? What would you say adds value to the brand?
- Do you experience that a constant relation with the brand helps you get a clearer picture of what the brand entails?
- What do you think that the brand's name and logo stands for? What does this brand symbolize to you?

Brand Love

- What do you feel for this brand? Please explain with your own words your feelings towards this brand.
- Do you feel devotion/love for this brand?
 - (If yes...): What is the main reason for you loving the brand?
 - (If no...): What could be reasons for you developing love for this brand?
- Would you miss the brand if it were no longer available?

Brand Commitment

- Did you purchase this brand last year? (If not, please explain why)
- What would make you want to purchase this brand again?
- How committed are you towards the brand?
- How can the company make you feel more committed towards the brand and make you want to have a long-term relationship with the brand?

Brand Loyalty

- Do you see yourself as loyal to this brand? Why/why not?
- When you purchase (product category) how often do you choose this brand?
- Have you returned to this brand after purchasing products from other brands? If so, why?

- If the brand were not available, how would you then feel about having to make a purchase from another brand? Please explain in your own words.
- What would increase your loyalty towards the brand?
- What do you think is important for the clothing retail industry, from a consumer's viewpoint, to do in order to retain their customers?

SWEDISH VERSION

Bakgrundsfakta

- Ålder:
- Man/Kvinna
- Hur länge har du varit kund hos xxxx?
- När handlade du xxx senast?

Brand Image

- Identifierar du dig själv med andra som använder detta varumärke?
- I vilken utsträckning skulle du säga att detta varumärke är använt av personer som påminner om dig själv?
- Hur uttrycker du dig som person? Använder du detta varumärke för att uppfylla din nuvarande uppfattning av dig själv som person eller din ideala bild av dig själv?
- Hur skulle du beskriva varumärkets personlighet? Om du bara fick använda tre ord till att beskriva varumärket, vilka ord skulle det då vara?
- Vad upplever du är varumärkets karaktärsdrag? Vad skulle du säga är det som tillför värde till varumärket?
- Upplever du att en konstant relation med xxx varumärket hjälper dig att förstå vad märket innehåller?
- Vad tror du att märkets namn och logga står för? Vad symboliserar detta märke för dig?

Brand love

- Hur känner du inför detta märke? Var god förklara med dina egna ord dina känslor för detta märke.
- Känner du tillgivenhet/kärlek till detta varumärke?
(om ja...): Vilken är den främsta anledningen för att älska xxx märket?
(om nej...): Vad skulle kunna vara anledningar för att få dig att älska xxx märket?
- Skulle du sakna detta varumärke om det inte längre fanns tillgängligt?

Brand Commitment

- Köpte du detta märke förra året? (Om inte, förklara gärna varför)
- Vad skulle göra att du skulle vilja köpa märket igen?
- Hur hängiven/engagerad är du gentemot varumärket?
- Hur kan företaget få dig att känna dig mer hängiven till xxx märket och vilja ha en långvarig relation till märket?

Brand Loyalty

- Anser du dig vara lojal till xxx märket? Varför?

- När du köper /xxxx/ hur ofta väljer du detta varumärke?
- Har du kommit tillbaka till detta märke efter att ha köpt produkter från något annat märke? Om ja, varför?
- Om varumärket inte finns tillgängligt, hur känner du då över att du måste köpa från ett annat märke? Förklara i dina egna ord.
- Vad tycker du skulle öka din lojalitet mot detta varumärke?
- Vad tror du är viktigt för modebranschen, ur en konsuments synvinkel, att göra för att behålla sina kunder?

APPENDIX 3 - THEMATIC NETWORK ANALYSIS

GLOBAL THEME - Brand Experience

Organizational Theme - Brand Characteristics

Basic Themes:

- Quality is an important brand characteristic.
- The products bring feelings of satisfaction.
- The unavailability of the brand is associated with feelings of distress and insecurity.
- The brand brings a comfortable feeling.
- It is important that customers feel secure about the product's features such as quality.
- It is important that the brand brings a sense of credibility.

Organizational Theme - Empowerment of the Self

Basic Themes:

- The brand should bring feelings of safety and pride.
- It is important that the customer feels safe when purchasing the brand and have no doubts about its quality.
- The brand should bring feelings of strength and magnificence.
- It is the feelings from wearing the brand that are important

GLOBAL THEME - Brand Connection

Organizational Theme - Brand Ancestry

Basic Themes:

- A brand's history and identity are important aspects to consider.
- The DNA of a company is connected with the identification between brand and customers.
- The Swedish heritage can be seen as an important brand characteristic.
- The Scandinavian environment is an overlooked brand characteristic.

Organizational Theme - Brand Relationships

Basic Themes:

- It is beneficial to create a relationship between customer and brand in terms of commitment.
- Having an increased knowledge about the brand results in a deeper relation between customer and brand.
- Having a constant relation with the brand aids the understanding of the brand.
- Purchase behaviour and re-purchase of the brand is connected to brand loyalty.

Organizational Theme - Brand Aspiration

Basic Themes:

- The identification between brand and customers involve a certain lifestyle attitude among the customers.
- Consumers use the brand to fulfil their ideal selves.

Organizational Theme - Brand Love

Basic Themes:

- When the customers feel in their hearts true identification with the brand, they are able to become truly loyal to the brand.
- An empathetic stance of a brand results in devoted customers who can sympathize with such brand features.

GLOBAL THEME - Brand Development

Organizational Theme - Holistic View

Basic Themes:

- It is seen as very important for a company to consider the totality of a brand.
- Companies must deliver on every level and consider the total experience.
- Companies should have a certain mind-set, a company culture that impregnates the entire organization.

Organizational Theme - Brand Development

Basic Themes:

- Innovation is a common brand characteristic but also an important part in a brand's development.
- To stay true to the brand and remember the core is seen as important in retaining customers.
- You constantly need to reinvent yourself and development of the brand needs to be done continuously.
- There seems to be a change in target group for all brands.
- The belief among both consumers and company is that there is a wide range of customers.

Organizational Theme - Brand Future

Basic Themes:

- Having a long-term thinking and striving towards a long-term relationship is important.
- There is a certain discrepancy in the development of the brand where the company is further ahead in its thinking than what their customers are.
- An increase in availability and assortment is important for customers.
- It is important to fulfil customers' expectations but also exceed them in order to reach a long-term commitment.



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